ALUMNI LIFE, 9 | LIVING SPACES, 33 | SLICE OF LIFE, 53

west hartford LIFE
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VOLUME 3, EDITION 7

'A lot of life left to live'

Elmwood Senior Center celebrates 100th birthday of longtime volunteer

See story on page 22

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QUOTE OF NOTE:

"We're trying to build a community of friends for these children, as well as a network and a community for families."
- Leah Bailey Moon

See story page 54

ON THE COVER

Victoria "Vicki" Heller (center) poses with her son, Richard Heller, and daughter, Nancy Burke, at a party held at the Elmwood Senior Center to celebrate the volunteer's 100th birthday.

Photo by Abigail Albair
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Clarification

In our March story, "Surviving the Holocaust," there was a reference to the Bergen Belsen concentration camp. We did not state its location. It was in Germany.

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Photo by Mara Dresner

Courtesy photo

Left: Judy Dorros has always enjoyed dogs, getting her first pet when she was a young child. Here, she poses with Maya. **Above:** While Judy Dorros often paints dogs, she also paints larger creatures, such as these bears. She sometimes finds inspiration from photos in magazines.

Pointing her feet toward the door

Retired teacher Judy Dorros is also longtime artist

by Mara Dresner
Staff Writer

Walk into Judy Dorros' apartment at Hoffman SummerWood Community and for a moment, you might think you've stumbled into a gallery. Each wall is filled with original works of art. The twist? The paintings are done by Dorros and her son, Ken, an artist from Glastonbury.

Judy Dorros has been painting since she was a child.

"When I was a kid, I was an only child, and my parents bought me some paints. I loved to paint flowers. I had a dog and was always painting dogs. I rode horses; I love horses and nature," she said. "I did a lot of outdoor things. I didn't ever like still life."

Her favorite medium has been oils.

"I started on that and I stayed with it. I like the way you can blend them. I like the colors. I'm old-fashioned. I tried watercolor and I did it from time to time. I never enjoyed it. I tried acrylic," she said.

She still paints, using a space down the hall from her apartment.

"They have me working with acrylic. People around here give me pictures of their animals and I paint their dogs," said Dorros, who also enjoys painting portraits, sometimes finding inspiration in photos from magazines.

Dorros doesn't limit her creativity to visual arts. A graduate of New York University, she originally attended Bucknell University, which she was attracted to because of their marching band, where she played the flute.

"I play piano, flute and guitar. My guitar is sitting there gathering dust. I don't play it very often. I was taught classical but my favorite kind of music is jazz, without hesitation. It makes me move. I used to love to jitterbug. Sometimes I'll put it on here and I'll jitterbug with my broom or something. I still play it; I have the old CDs," said Dorros who was a high school jitterbug champion.

She has fond memories of once meeting Count Basie at a concert.

"I met him when he went outside for cigarettes. He was such a nice man. We sat outside for a long time. I just remember meeting him and talking with him for quite a long time while he had a cigarette during intermission. He kept going like this," she said, miming playing the piano. "I really sat and talked with him for a long time."

She has had other celebrity encounters, too.

"A lot of opera stars lived near me [in Westchester County] so I knew a lot of them," she said. "Robert Merrill and Richard Tucker were always at my sister-in-law's house."

Dorros was an elementary school teacher for many years.

"I loved teaching. I taught elementary school, mostly third grade. I'm still in touch with a couple of my students. It was the best thing I could have done with my life.

They gave me more than I gave them, that's all I can tell you. Some of them have done very good things with their lives; I'm very proud of them," she said. "They're like human sponges. They come and they want to learn so much. I remember I would write a play every year and we would put on a play at the end of the school year. We'd do it all in poetry. I'd write the music; I'd make the costumes. It was like an all-year project. It was so much fun; I loved it."

Dorros admits that she occasionally had favorite students, such as Laurence Holzman.

"He's a sweetheart; he's like my third son. I absolutely adore him. I had him for two years. I taught him in the second grade and I taught him in the third grade. I did a very sneaky thing. He wasn't supposed to be in my third grade [class] but I went in and changed the names in the principal's office," she said with a chuckle.

Holzman, who lives in Dobbs Ferry, New York, is a non-practicing lawyer who currently is writing and producing musical theatre. In addition to his own shows, for which he writes book and lyrics, he is part of a production company that has produced shows on Broadway and in London, including the current Broadway revival of "Fiddler on the Roof." He recently stopped in to see Dorros when he was in the area for a family event.

"She was a wonderful teacher who instilled in all of us a love of reading, nature, art, music and theater, which made a lasting impression on many of my classmates and me. I have remained close with several of my elementary school classmates, and we all still vividly remember the original plays we put on in her class, how she would draw characters from the books we read every time we gave an oral book report and put the drawings up on the bulletin board with our names, and how she would play the guitar and sing with us in class," Holzman said.

"Judy's warmth and love for all of us in the class was felt by all. I think that is why I have remained

Judy Dorros' painting of a lion is one her many works that hangs in her apartment at SummerWood.

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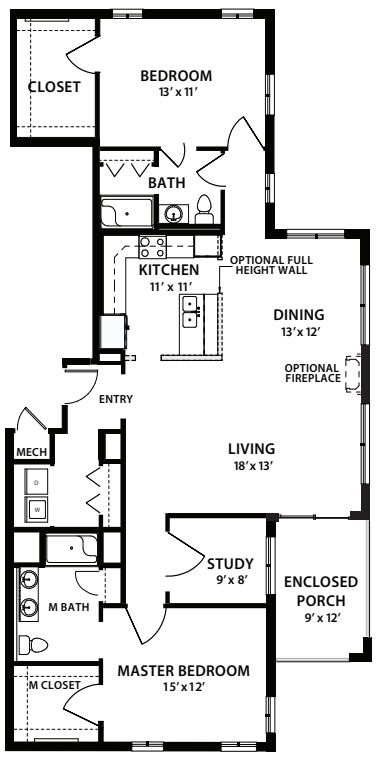

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in touch with her over the years. That is a rare thing to find in a teacher. In the years after I was in her class, I would always find excuses to go back to her classroom to visit and I remember that I used to go at least once every summer to visit her at her pool club for a fun day of swimming. In later years, Judy came to my wedding, and I even took my own kids to visit her several times."

Holzman remembers that Dorros would find a way to connect with every student.

"I can also remember how she would cater to the needs of individual students long before the system had identified 'special needs' and ways of addressing them within the classroom. For my friend who required medicine each day to keep him calm, she devised a fun and memorable morning ritual. He would take his meds, climb up on a counter in the bathroom and shout, 'Geronimo!' as he jumped down to the floor. She somehow knew that condoning this fun, playful display of wildness each morning would be just the trick to getting him to stay calm for the rest of the day. And it worked," Holzman recalled.

Dorros also brought her love of science into the classroom, including astronomy. She even had hoped to be a teacher in space.

"I wanted to go up in that. I've always been fascinated by that," she noted.

"I loved teaching. ... It was the best thing I could have done with my life. They gave me more than I gave them."

–Judy Dorros

She did get to see the space shuttle launch when astronaut Jeffrey Hoffman, the son of family friends, was on board.

"That was exciting. Then I got Jeffrey to come meet my third graders. That was very thrilling for them," she said. "A lot of my kids have come here to visit me. Everybody should be as lucky as I was in choice of careers. I've been very blessed in my life. I look back on it I really have, wonderful parents, wonderful husband, wonderful children. I've had a really good life."

She and her late husband Sheldon, better known as Shelly, were married for 51 years. During her summers off from school, Dorros was an avid traveler, visiting England, France, Austria, Israel and Alaska.

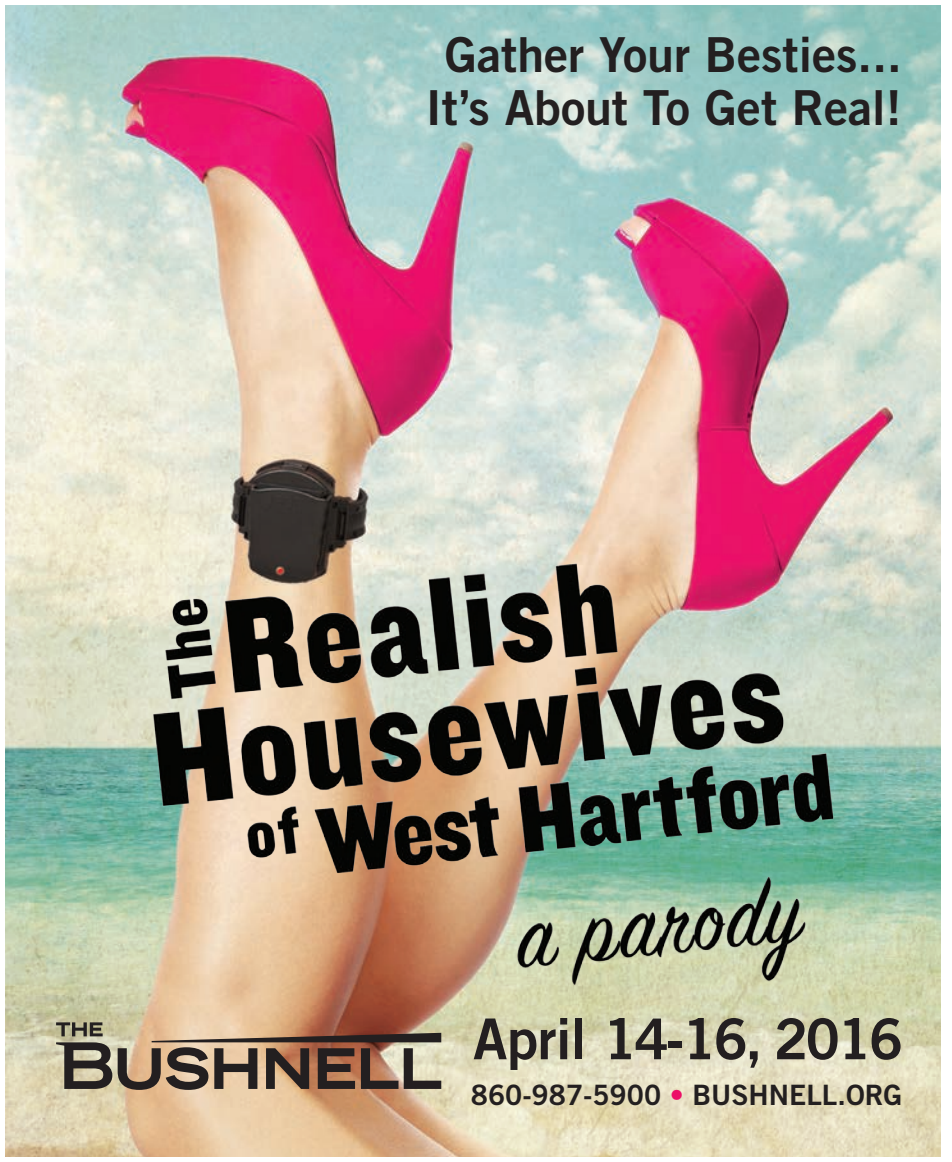
"I think my favorite trip was to the Galapagos. They have species of animals and birds there that are no place else on the planet. You fly down and see this group of little islands off the coast of Ecuador. There you are and you get on a ship and you go from island to island. That's a trip I'm so glad I took. I went with my cousin. My husband never went on any of my trips. I went alone; there was always someone to talk to. He went to the office and I traveled. He kind of missed out. His sister liked to travel; she went everywhere," she said.

She often travelled with her beloved Aunt Ruth, especially to visit family.

"I once wrote an article about her and it made it to the New York Times. We flew back and forth I don't know how many times on Eastern Airlines. They all knew Aunt Ruth. She knew I don't know how many jokes. Everyone would gather 'round our seats and Aunt Ruth would start telling the jokes," she said.

In addition to traveling, Dorros loved to fly.

"I took flying lessons, but my husband made me stop. He got nervous," she said.



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Judy Dorros and her son Ken are both avid painters.

Courtesy photo

Dorros was also quite the athlete, enjoying water skiing and playing tennis well enough to occasionally win a ladies doubles tournament at her local swim and tennis club.

Today, you might find Dorros painting, reading, doing a crossword or simply enjoying a conversation. Two of her favorite – and frequent – visitors are her son Ken, an attorney-turned-artist who lives in Glastonbury, and Maya, her Siberian husky that Ken has "adopted." A second son, Matt, lives in California.

"[Ken] makes me happy; he makes me very happy. He and I are so alike. He is a chip off the old block. He is my father, his sense of humor, the music he likes. I look at him and I see my father. I worshipped my father; he was such a good man. He was one of eight. He came from a coal mining family in Pennsylvania," she said.

"If we actually got to choose our parents, I surely would have chosen my mom. She's always been young at heart and still has an unusual inner youthfulness that draws people to her. Maybe that's part of why she was the best third-grade teacher anyone could ever have had. Her special talent was identifying students most in need of help and finding a way to reach those kids. She made a big difference in a lot of their lives," Ken Dorros said. "Growing up, there was always support for doing things creative. While my mom's profession was teaching, she often played music on the piano, guitar or flute, and created many beautiful paintings over the years. So, when I decided to change careers and become a painter, and stop practicing law, it was with my mom's full support and encouragement, for which I'm grateful."

While Judy Dorros has had her share of health challenges, she lives life each day remembering the words of her beloved Aunt Ruth.

"She said when you get up in the morning your feet should point toward the door. I never forgot that." **WHL**

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Photo by Lynn Woike

Alumni LIFE

When film critic David Edelstein speaks, people listen

by Lynn Woike
Editor

The first movie film critic David Edelstein saw was "Pinocchio" – at a drive-in with his parents. He was about 2.

"I loved drive-ins, I really did," he said, listing those that were once in Hartford, Southington, Windsor and Newington.

The night would begin with a cartoon and coming attractions.

"The best ones were ... triple horror features on the Berlin Turnpike – three Vincent Price movies, or Boris Karloff – bottom-of-the-barrel movies I loved as a kid," he said, adding that even if they were all bad, you still felt like you got your money's worth.

Drive-ins are almost extinct; however, there is one in Wellfleet, Massachusetts, near his wife's parents' summer home.

"We try to get there all the time," Edelstein said.

He is the chief film critic for New York magazine and NPR's "Fresh Air." He is a frequent contributor to the New York Times' Arts & Leisure section and is a regular commentator on film for "CBS Sunday Morning." Edelstein's reviews have also appeared in the Village Voice, The New York Post and Rolling Stone.

He co-authored "Shooting to Kill: How an Independent Producer Blasts Through the Barriers to Make Movies that Matter" with independent film producer Christine Vachon of Killer Films, and is the author of two plays, "Feed the Monkey" and "Blaming Mom."

He is a member of the National Society of Film Critics.

"I wasn't a happy kid," Edelstein said of growing up in the 1970s. "West Hartford was very isolated. ... Suburbia is a very artificial concept, for better or worse."

Unlike people for whom movies are an escape from the real world, Edelstein went to movies to find it.

"There were upheavals in the rest of the country and I found that my lifeline to the real world was movies. My link was movies,"

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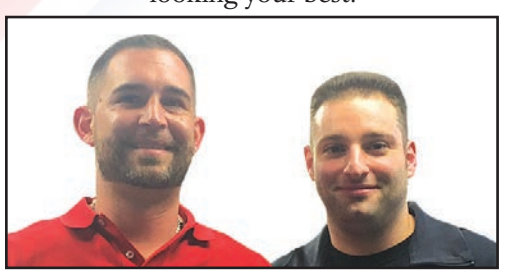

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he said in a telephone interview. "It was wonderful to go to movies back then."

He recalled a couple of twin theaters in Avon, Central and the Elm in West Hartford, and the Webster and the Strand in Hartford.

"Film is an enormously manipulative medium ... shaping our values, often for better, sometimes for worse," Edelstein said.

Among the movies he said helped him see the world were "The French Connection," "The Godfather," "Bonnie and Clyde," "The Last Picture Show" and "M.A.S.H."

It was at Cinerama on Farmington Avenue that he saw "2001: A Space Odyssey" three times.

"I didn't understand it in the least, but I couldn't get enough of it," he said.

"It's funny. I go back and I look at these movies and I try to figure out what they did for me, how they insinuated themselves into my psyche. Sometimes it's quite alarming."

Recalling his years as a student, Edelstein said, "Norfeldt and King Philip had some of the best teachers I ever had – really passionate people who seemed to love what they are doing. They were very important to me."

Edelstein said noted that it was Samuel Carpenter at Norfeldt who "really brought out the writer in me."

Edelstein's first movie reviews were at Beth Israel, where he went to Hebrew School and Sunday School, and at Loomis Chafee, where he wrote for the high school's paper.

"I'm sure I wrote some stupid reviews. I do remember I didn't know at all what I was talking about ... but I made it sound good."

It wasn't until he graduated Harvard University in 1981 and got a job as a teaching assistant that he said he became "a really good student."

"I was a great section leader. This was, to me, an incredible privilege to assist professor Robert Brustein," who founded both the Yale Repertory Theatre and the American Repertory Theatre in Cambridge, Massachusetts. "I worked so hard. I literally learned to become a student by teaching sections of these larger courses."

Edelstein was still in college when he got a job at the Boston Phoenix as "a third-string theater critic and a fourth-string movie critic." It paid $35 a review.

"Then ... I got hired at the Village Voice and that was it. I was on the road," said Edelstein, who now lives in Brooklyn.

Since then, there have been thousands of reviews.

"Right now, there's simply the challenge of holding a job because the profession has changed so much with the advent of the Internet. Now, tens of thousands of people would love to write reviews and they post them for free. Newspapers wonder why we pay critics."

Edelstein said he learned the craft of critiquing from Malcolm Johnson at the Hartford Courant.

"A lot of people misunderstand criticism. Many people think of it only as a consumer guide."

–David Edelstein

"A lot of people misunderstand criticism. Many people think of it only as a consumer guide," he said, but "a movie raises all kinds of questions that are fun to think about and fun to talk about."

"A critic catalyzes the reaction between a viewer and a film, or a work of art. ... Just reading or thinking about it makes you go back over your own responses and think about the work from different angles.

"There's a real anti-intellectual strain in this country," he said, noting, "people often say, 'Why do you have to analyze it? Just watch it and enjoy it.'

"I think if you analyze it, you extend the pleasure. ... It's not just something you consume and forget."

He said he can't mindlessly watch a movie.

"I'm a critic no matter what I'm watching. I enjoy reliving things in my mind. ... Sometimes you react to something and you don't know what, and you have to think about it for a long time, like savoring a great wine – pull it apart in your mouth and analyze the finish. That's the fun part."

Edelstein considers himself to be an entertainer as well as a critic. The challenge, he said, is to "find a way to transmit my own reactions to something to the page that's entertaining and illuminating to the reader."

He sometimes gets impatient with people who want a thumbs-up or a thumbs-down rating, or desire a ranking on a scale of one to 10.

"I think there's a lot of movies that leave me feeling ambivalent, but are worth seeing."

Acknowledging that some people say he's too wishy-washy, Edelstein said, "I would like to be the most virile wishy-washy critic out there," adding, "There are many films I think people

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should see that I don't really love."

Not wanting to be "just a movie person" because "there's nothing more boring than just a movie person," Edelstein said, "It's so important for me to follow politics, to read voraciously."

Of the 1,000 or so movies that get released every year in New York City, Edelstein may see as many as 400. In an average week, he sees five or six films and writes 1,000 words or more each about three or four of them.

At the end of every year, he publishes his top 10 list.

"Often times in the last weeks of the year, I am seeing five movies a day to make the list," he said.

His reviews are comprised of his responses to the movie, be it a high-brow art film or a low-budget comedy.

"I love all kinds of movies – from the lowest to the highest," he said, admitting, "I love dumb, raunchy movies – preferably smart raunchy movies – and abstract impressionist movies."

Action movies have always done well in the American market, Edelstein said. They impact the way people view the world. The portrayal of good guys having to extract justice from bad guys "seeps into a lot of our thinking."

The vigilante strain of action films is intense. Its premise is a person was wronged and now has to take revenge, that the injury gives the individual the right to be the judge, jury and executioner.

Edelstein is credited with coining the term "torture porn," a genre describing such movies as "Hostel" and "Saw" that has grown over the past 10 years. These movies feed those craving to see someone tortured – not just in horror flicks, but in mainstream movies, he said. It's a craving to feel something strongly and it's become an addiction. Some viewers of the intense suffering – such as in "The Revenant" – will identify with the victims, others with the abuser, he said.

Edelstein's been surprised with his success and said he never expected to be on television.

"I certainly didn't go looking for it. I've certainly worked very, very hard in my life," he said.

"One of my favorite things that's come of my career is being a regular guest on Colin's shows. Colin McEnroe is an absolute treasure. It's too bad he doesn't have a national audience. He's the best ... and an all-around great guy. ... He's so smart and he's so funny and he's also open. He's a good interviewer ... because he listens and he asks follow up questions."

McEnroe is also a West Hartford native. He attended Kingswood Oxford while Edelstein attended Loomis Chafee; and McEnroe attended Yale while Edelstein went to Harvard.

"We shouldn't like each other but we do," Edelstein said.

McEnroe said, "I've been calling David America's Greatest Living Film Critic (or AGLFC) for years. It's sort of a joke, but it's also a reality. I think he really is – and I read a lot of film criticism. He loves low – especially horror films – as much as he loves high. And he's not afraid to be the skunk at the garden party."

Calling Edelstein "fearless and a little mischievous," he said, "In life, as well as in criticism, David finds trouble-making an attractive and entertaining enterprise."

"A titanic level of eradication" separates him from the pack, McEnroe said.

"For a guy who has to watch several hundred movies a year, he's really well versed in ... pretty much everything else. I love people who can make connections among genres, who can link up insights about Henry IV and the Rolling Stones and Georges Braque and Philip Roth in a single spoken paragraph. David is pretty much the master of that. When David Bowie died, we scrambled to put a radio show together on short notice. David was one of my first calls, and he wound up having this amazing, impromptu conversation on-air with guitar legend Jim Chapdelaine." **WHL**

Movies according to David Edelstein

Here are reviews of some movies that won awards at this year's Oscars. All appeared in New York Magazine/Vulture.

"Spotlight"
"Every actor rises to the occasion."

"The Revenant"
"I think 'The Revenant' is, on the whole, pain without gain, but it's certainly a tour de force – literally, a feat of strength."

"Room"
"Room is astonishing: it transmutes a lurid, true-crime situation into a fairy tale in which fairy tales are a source of survival."

"Bridge of Spies"
"Sober but stirring …"

"The Big Short"
"McKay invents his own glorious goofball syntax: part business thriller, part stand-up comedy, with a liberal dash of NPR didacticism."

"The Hateful Eight"
"The movie is a lot of gore over a lot of nothing. I hope that won't be Tarantino's epitaph."

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Guiltiest pleasure

'The Realish Housewives of West Hartford: A Parody' comes to the Bushnell

by Lynn Woike
Editor

Ten years ago, on March 21, "The Real Housewives of Orange County" premiered on Bravo, becoming a dynasty with some 30 spinoffs internationally, including "The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills," "The Real Housewives of Melbourne" and "Kandi's Wedding." A parody inspired by the reality series brings brawls, booze and Botox to The Bushnell Center for the Perfoming Arts April 13-16.

The original play was created and written by veteran Chicago-based comics and "The Second City" writers Kate James and Tim Sniffen. Bringing the drama of "Real Housewives" to the Hartford stage, the production uses current events and people making headlines in West Hartford.

"We mine the locals for information based on what we need to tailor for the script," James said of the names of high-end shopping destinations, a well-known yoga studio, local restaurants, politicians and other cultural references.

"What we hear over and over again is what we drop into the script," customizing it, she said.

Sniffen added that the city in which the show is set serves as a backdrop for the drama of the five housewives.

Last fall, the show had an eight-week run in Minnesota, tailored to Edina, that served as a test run. Then, starting in January, it began to tour the country, hitting eight other cities – including Charlotte, Boston, Seattle and San Diego – before coming to Hartford. It's got bookings through October, with more locations being added.

"I thought that people would love to see their hometown parodied in the way that they're used to watching on TV. We try to take the best of that insanity and celebrate it," Sniffen said.

It's been fun to see the reception the show has received in each location, the writers said.

"I think we've found that it's universal," James said. "People love

A spoof of "The Real Housewives" television franchise is coming to The Bushnell Center for the Performing Arts.

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"It's fun, fast and high energy. It's such a unique niche of the reality genre. It was important for us to create something that celebrated that fun escapism."

–Kate James

celebrating their hometown. People in Ohio are not vastly different from the people in Seattle coming to see it. It's been fun for us to watch it evolve on the road."

Theatergoers are treating it like a party, Sniffen said.

"It's really a ball. People would get dressed up and come out with their friends.

It's a show that's meant to be a lot of fun. It's a show with a party atmosphere."

It makes for a great girls night out, James added.

Both writers are fans of "The Real Housewives" television franchise.

Rather than labeling it an addiction, James calls her faithful following of all the series an investment and she's proud of it, noting, "I'm not hiding in the shadows any longer. ... I think a lot of people have like some hidden shame about that and they're afraid to admit it, but one thing that's very interesting is working on the show has brought a lot of people out of the shadows that are now proud to admit that they watch the show."

Sniffen became a fan when he began writing the show, offering fresh eyes and a different perspective.

'The Realish Housewives of West Hartford: A Parody' features brawls, booze and Botox.

Courtesy photos

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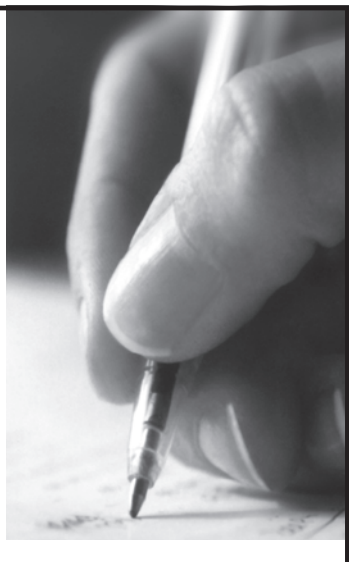

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Mail letters to 540 Hopmeadow Street, Simsbury, CT 0670 or email Lynn Woike, at lwoike@turleyct.com.

The characters

Randy Bowen
The gay, excitable host is delighted with himself and his media empire. He encourages conflict and meltdowns while keeping everyone liquored up.

Ravonka
She goes by the royal title of baroness and talks with a vague Eastern European accent.

Brooke
A no-nonsense, self-made woman, she has a chip on her shoulder because she's not part of high society.

Claudia-Louise
She's confident, preachy and gossipy; she thinks her perfect family is better than everyone else's.

Gwen
An ambitious, political player, she's just out of prison and eager to climb the power ladder again.

Desiree
While she's ever the optimist, this pampered, entitled neck model often has no idea what's going on.

"It's taken me completely," he said. Once you start watching, "it's really hard to look away, ... It's riveting."

While he may have come to "Housewives" recently, he said his pedigree of living in Locust Valley, New York – where there's "a lot of money floating around" – qualified him to write for the show. For an example, he cited a woman who walked into a flower shop with a cockatoo on her shoulder, and asked that the flowers for her house be matched to the bird's feathers.

The two comedy veterans met in the storied Chicago improv community and became friends. They previously joined forces on the award-winning collaboration between "The Second City" and the Lyric Opera of Chicago. Their current project may be less highbrow than the opera, but it is a blockbuster among reality shows.

James estimated that the show – which runs 80 minutes, not counting intermission – is about 80 percent scripted and 20 percent improv.

Sniffen counts three parts in the show that are left unscripted, allowing the performers to go with "whatever might be going on ... [involving] the audience to some degree."

The parody's characters are a "mashup" of "the best" character traits of all the housewives on all the shows.

"They're all made up," he said. "We couldn't choose five from the 'Real Housewifes' ocean. They're amalgamations of our favorite housewives from the 'Real Housewives' universe."

"It's fun, fast and high energy," James said of the play. "It's such a unique niche of the reality genre. It was important for us to create something that celebrated that fun escapism."

"The show that we were inspired by is pretty ridiculous, and so we wanted to have a show that just gives people all they've come to expect, and a little bit more."

–Tim Sniffen

"The show that we were inspired by is pretty ridiculous, and so we wanted to have a show that just gives people all they've come to expect, and a little bit more," Sniffen said.

The two said they are proud of creating a show that can be enjoyed both by hardcore fans as well as those who get dragged along.

"I really want people to know that if they don't have any experience with the show ... we've considered you. We want you to have a great time, too. We made a show that's fast and fun. You don't have to have insider knowledge to have a great time," James said. **WHL**

A passion for sculpting

Sharon Sklar is the only Rolfing practitioner in Greater Hartford

by Lynn Woike
Editor

Photo by Lynn Woike

Sharon Sklar went from sculpting clay to sculpting bodies. As a child, she'd always enjoyed knitting, sewing, cut-and-paste projects and other artistic endeavors. As an adult, she's still working with her hands – and enjoying every minute.

It was at the School of Fine Arts at Boston University while pursuing a degree in sculpting that she discovered her love of the human body. She took anatomy courses her first two years, and sculpted a life-size nude each of her last two years. She also became aware of the importance of the mind-body connection.

Moving back to the Hartford area, she found a group of massage therapists at the YWCA and started going for bodywork.

"One massage therapist asked me if I'd ever heard of Rolfing, because she knew I was doing a lot of reading on mind-body techniques. And I said, 'No. What is it?' She said, 'I'm not really sure but I think it's about organizing and integrating your body.' It rang so true for me, I looked into it and I started getting Rolfed."

During her second session, Sklar said she had "a spiritual experience; it was as clear as day" – she was told to become a Rolfer.

It wasn't something she went looking for; it was something that found her, she added.

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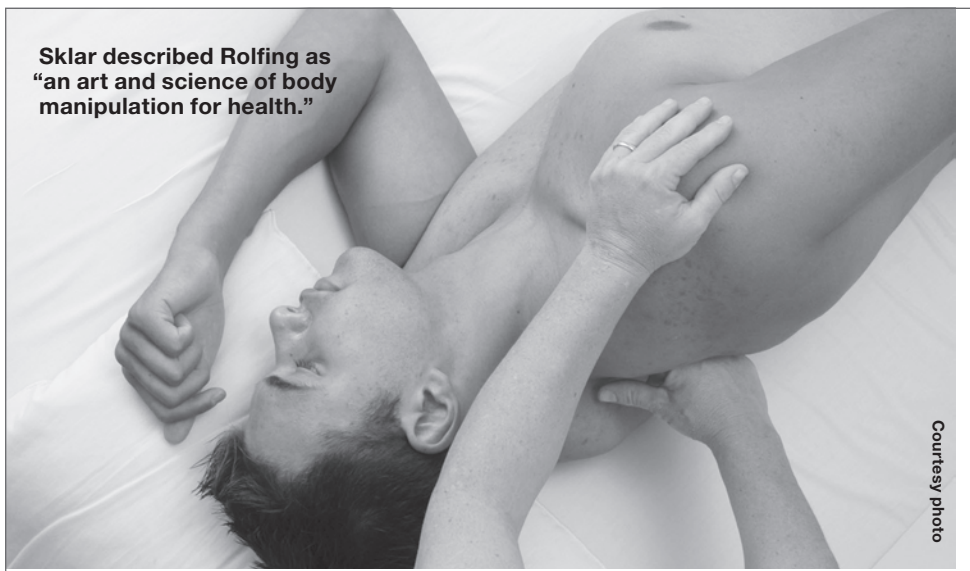

Sklar described Rolfing as "an art and science of body manipulation for health."

Courtesy photo

"I was 22 when I got Rolfed and I just knew it was what I was going do for the rest of my life. Now, here I am in my 35th year and … I look forward to Monday mornings. I love what I do."

Sklar described Rolfing as "an art and science of body manipulation for health." The body stores the fallout from physical and emotional injuries, illnesses, stress and unhealthy habits. By working on the connective tissue, the stored blocks are released so spontaneous healing can occur.

People come for relief of pain, injuries and stiffness, as well as to improve their athletic performance and their appearance, rebalance their bodies, and enhance personal growth. Rolfing can also help when used before and after surgery.

Named after its founder, Dr. Ida P. Rolf, Rolfing Structural Integration is a form of bodywork that reorganizes the connective tissues, called fascia, which permeates the entire body. The goal is to reorder the body to bring its major segments – head, shoulders, thorax, pelvis and legs – into vertical alignment.

Like chiropractic methods, Rolfing aims to align the body. However, chiropractic does it by manipulating bones while Rolfing works on the soft tissue so it stops pulling at the bones.

A common misconception is that Rolfing is painful, Sklar said.

"I look at it this way," she said. "You hire me to help you find the places in your body that are stopping you. So, we have to confront it, so my hands … move in. The pressure creates friction, the friction creates heat and the heat begins to dissolve the gluing of the fascia. It's deep movement like this throughout your body, finding the places where you're all stuck together and we get you unstuck."

Treatment is always done at a level that the client finds comfortable.

Rolfing takes place in a series of 10 sessions, each about 75 minutes, over a span of three or four months. Each session builds on the previous one. Some people choose to return at some later time for further sessions, generally if other traumas occur.

Sklar had work to do before she could apply to The Rolf Institute in Colorado.

"The prerequisites took a long time. You had to learn how to touch a body first," she said. "When I went to Rolfing school, it was a minimum of 25 years old; it was a minimum of a college degree; college-level courses in anatomy, kinesiology, physiology and psychology; then a certification in therapeutic massage."

Then there was a two-day interview before she was accepted to the course that consisted of two 12-week sessions. After practicing for several years, she went on to get her Advanced Rolfing Certification.

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After working in various places, including the Rolf Institute and in a naturopathic physician's office, 20 years ago, Sklar bought the house on South Main Street in West Hartford that now houses her office. The space is quiet and peaceful; a large table takes up about a quarter of the room and two dogs sleep on cushions along the far wall.

Clients have ranged in age from 3 weeks to 99 years old. The majority are 40-70, with a lot in their 80s. Most have come because they've tried everything else with no success.

Jane Comerford of West Hartford said she turned to Rolfing after her massage therapist commented that her fascia was so tight, she couldn't get to her muscles.

"I had lots of muscle aches. I would get a massage once a month, but it didn't hold. … My posture was starting to not be great," she said, adding, "It made a big difference in terms of my pain level – a big difference."

After her initial 10 sessions, she has returned frequently over the years – not only to help with the effects of injuries, but as a form of prevention.

"I'm hard on my body," Comerford said. "Massage was soothing, but it didn't get to the root of the issue. Sharon's the real deal. She knows anatomy. She knows the body. She's able to pinpoint what's going wrong."

Grant Tyler, agreed, saying, "She is really skilled. She really knows the body. … She is one of the best body workers I've ever been to. She's amazing. … I very highly recommend her."

He had thought about the benefits of Rolfing for 30 years, but it took a head-on collision a year ago – and no relief from the whiplash that resulted despite chiropractic care – that led him to Sklar.

After recently completing the 10 sessions, he said he no longer feels the effects of the accident.

"Literally, after my first session, my neck felt 40 percent better – and she only did minimal work exactly on my neck."

Rolfing has also helped Sklar get through a bulging disk in her back, breast cancer and the side effects of its treatment, a car accident and Bell's palsy. At one point, she underwent nine surgical procedures in less than three years.

Understanding the body's structure helped her heal herself and the journey made her stronger.

"It's really all about getting balanced," she said. "Dr. Ida P. Rolf said, 'When the body gets working appropriately, it will spontaneously heal itself.' That's been my mantra for my whole life. … At 61, I'm the most fit I've ever been."

Sklar and her older dog have been in the pet therapy program at Hartford Hospital. She's also a mentor in the public schools. WHL

For more information, call Sharon Sklar at 860-561-4337, visit sharonsklarrolfing.com or send email to sharonsklarrolfing@gmail.com.

"Dr. Ida P. Rolf said, 'When the body gets working appropriately, it will spontaneously heal itself.' That's been my mantra for my whole life. … At 61, I'm the most fit I've ever been."

–Sharon Sklar

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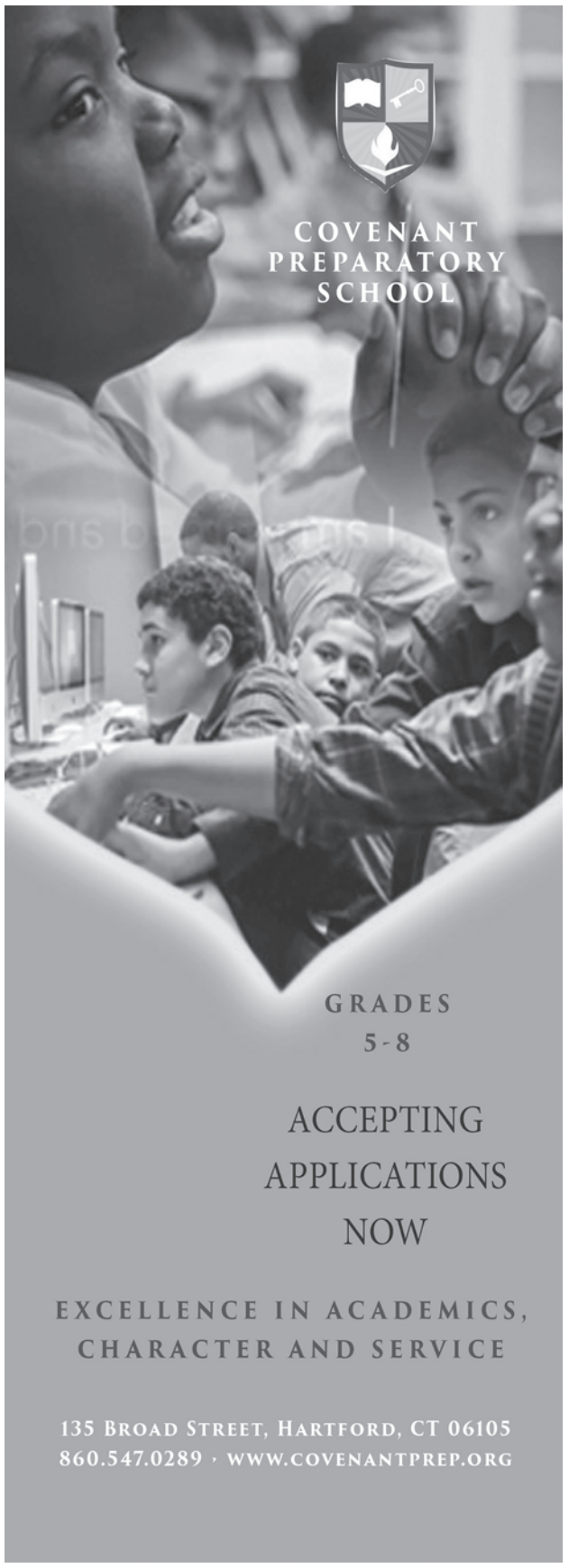
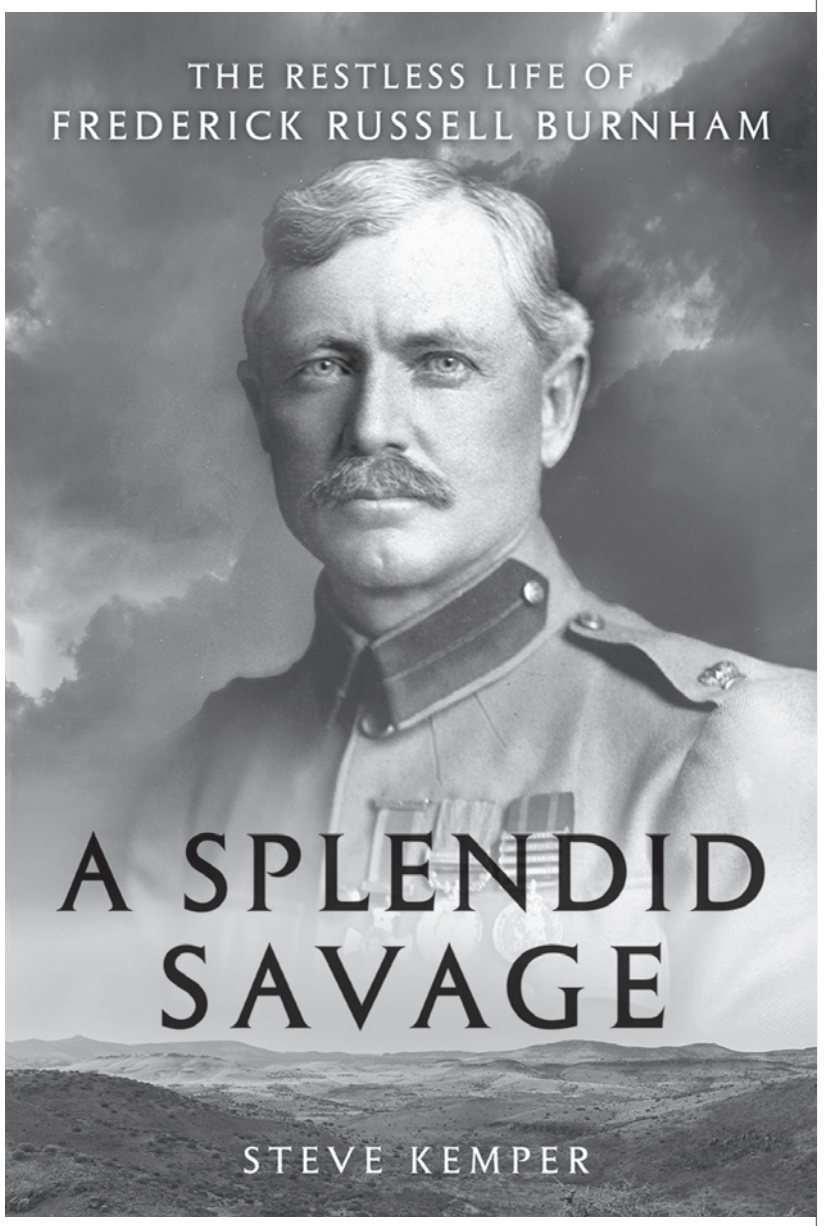


Bringing a 'savage' scout to life

Steve Kemper pens a book on the 'sheer unbelieveableness' of Frederick Russell Burnham's life

by Alison Jalbert
Assistant Editor



Steve Kemper didn't set out to write a book on Frederick Russell Burnham.

Ten years ago he came across a reference to "the great American scout" while researching a story about hyenas for Smithsonian.

His interest was piqued and he did a little research, but then African explorer Heinrich Barth caught his attention. That led to his second book, "A Labyrinth of Kingdoms: 10,000 Miles Through Islamic Africa."

Kemper said Burnham "kept tapping me on the shoulder," so he returned to him, and his research begot his third book, "A Splendid Savage: The Restless Life of Frederick Russell Burnham," which came out in January.

What attracted him to the story was the "sheer unbelieveableness" of Burnham's life, he said.

"The events he participated in, the things he survived, how he bopped all over the globe and survived – it's sort of this boyhood adventure stuff that got me into him. If you look into his story more deeply, things get more complicated fast."

At 15 months old, Burnham survived a Sioux raid in Minnesota when his mother hid him in a cornfield as their homestead burned, according to a press release about the book. By age 12, he lived alone and worked as a Western Union messenger in the pueblo of Los Angeles. By 14, he was a hunter providing meat to remote camps in California's mountains and deserts.

Burnham was a teenager in the 1880s and apprenticed himself to frontiersmen to learn scouting and woodcraft. He also learned prospecting, which helped him during gold rushes in the West, various regions in Africa and the Klondike.

Kemper, who lives in West Hartford, said there is "a trove" of Burnham's letters both at Yale University and at Stanford's Hoover Institution. Burnham and his wife, Blanche, often wrote letters to each other, all of which they saved.

"You really get into people's lives up to your elbows when they write as many letters as the Burnhams did," he said.

Burnham's life of fame began when he left the United States for what would become Rhodesia in southern Africa.

"At the time, it was just a mass of land controlled by England," Kemper explained. "Just as he got there with his wife and son, war broke out between the natives and settlers."

He was involved in a famous event in Rhodesian history, the Shangani Patrol, of which he was only one of three survivors. In 1893, during the First Matabele War, more than 3,000 Matabele warriors ambushed 34 soldiers of the British South Africa Company. Kemper said in

Rhodesian history, that event is comparable to Custer and the Alamo.

When another Matabele War broke out a few years later, Burnham's fame grew even more after he assassinated a spiritual leader. He tracked the leader to a sacred cave, killed him and then escaped.

Burnham left Africa for the Klondike Gold Rush. He was called back, however, to serve as the chief of scouts for the British forces in the Boer War.

"The British didn't know how to do recon and avoid traps," Kemper said. "Burnham had a lot of famous escapades there behind enemy lines. Everywhere he turned, he was doing something dangerous that got him headlines."

His travels took him to West Africa for mineral expeditions and, in 1909, to Mexico, where he likely helped save President William Howard Taft from an assassination attempt.

"He knew Theodore Roosevelt, Winston Churchill and Cecil Rhodes – a lot of people who were his friends because of what he did," Kemper said.

Roosevelt said Burnham was an ideal scout.

"He is a scout and a hunter of courage and ability, a man totally without fear, a sure shot and a fighter. He is the ideal scout, and when enlisted in the military service of any country, he is bound to be of the greatest benefit."

Robert Baden-Powell, another friend of Burnham's, met him during the Second Matabele War. Baden-Powell believed that scouts were important to the military, a sentiment with which the British forces did not agree, Kemper said.

"He also thought it was important to teach boys woodcraft, [which he learned from Burnham]. He talked with Burnham and picked his brain constantly," Kemper said. "He loved the idea of children, of teaching boys stuff. Burnham was one of Baden-Powell's inspirations – they were lifelong correspondents."

Baden-Powell, when founding the Boy Scouts, adopted Burnham's skills and standards, as well as his belief that a scout should live by a code of honor.

One thing Kemper found notable in his research on Burnham is that as he got older, he believed many of the things he valued were being lost, but he never lost faith in America.

"He epitomizes so many great things about America, and so many things we're still wrestling with," Kemper said.

Burnham had a willingness to start over; he was defeated and lost many times, but was always ready to begin again, feeling confident he would succeed. He believed self-reliance and independence are valuable traits, and was "very clear-eyed" about power and how it corrupts people.

"On the other side, we have his certainty that the white race is superior … and that immigrants weren't good," Kemper said, which contradicts with the fact that Burnham emigrated from Britain and immigrated to Rhodesia. "There are a lot of things in his life that make me thoughtful about what's going on now."

The reviews of "A Splendid Savage" have been "incredibly exciting," Kemper said, with many critics saying it reads like an adventure story.

In a starred review, Kirkus said, "In Kemper's sure and enthusiastic hands, Burnham storms through the pages of this rousing volume, outwitting determined foes and collecting mining and ranching interests on two continents that never seemed to pay off as expected. … Thrilling adventures presented with the flair they deserve."

Publishers Weekly said the book is "an account chockfull of adventures that feel ripped from dime-store novels," while the History Book Club said if the book weren't nonfiction, "it might seem an overly ambitious adventure novel whose hero deserved a multi-volume series."

Kemper said his goal was to place Burnham in the context of his time, as he's not unlike Roosevelt, Churchill or even Mahatma Ghandi.

"You can learn from history and also be entertained by it," he said.

Kemper, a freelance journalist who has also written the book "Code Name Ginger," said he isn't currently working on a fourth book.

"No one is tapping me on the shoulder yet." WHL

For more information on Steve Kemper and his books, visit www.stevekemper.net. "A Splendid Savage" can be purchased at Amazon.com, Barnes and Noble stores or indiebound.org.

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Celebrating a multidisciplinary milestone

Trinity College marks the 25th anniversary of its neuroscience department

Sarah Raskin, director of the neuroscience program, works with students at Trinity College to measure electrophysiology physiological changes associated with memory in people who have had a brain injury.

John Marinelli photo courtesy of Trinity College

by Alison Jalbert
Assistant Editor

Trinity College is marking its neuroscience program's 25th anniversary during the 2015-16 academic year, celebrating the accomplishments of its students and faculty.

The program began in the early 1990s, making Trinity one of the first liberal arts institutions to explore neuroscience teaching and research. Sarah Raskin, a West Hartford resident and director of the neuroscience program, said that back then, psychobiologist Priscilla Kehoe found students lining up outside her door, looking to create a new major.

Kehoe, now the director of research at the UCLA School of Nursing, said in a written reflection on her time at Trinity that once it was known she was engaged in research and teaching about the brain and behavior, many students wanted to create and independent major in psychobiology.

"It did not take long to realize that I was in the process of creating a major that was highly desirable in an area that was becoming a focus for scientists around the world," she wrote.

Raskin said Kehoe discovered there were

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many people on campus doing work around the brain and nervous system. As the number of independent psychology majors increased, Kehoe and her colleagues agreed it was time to create a formal major to satisfy the needs of those who were interested. Among the founding group of professors is West Hartford resident and professor of philosophy Dan Lloyd, who has been a faculty member at Trinity since 1987.

"Trinity had one of the first undergraduate neuroscience majors back then," Raskin said. "We were being asked to go speak at other venues to talk about how to create neuroscience programs at other colleges."

Neuroscience, according to Trinity's website, is a multidisciplinary field concerned with the nervous system, its components and functional activities, including behavior and consciousness. The program includes faculty from the biology, chemistry, engineering, philosophy and psychology departments. A neuroscience major can lead to a career in scientific research, health professions, education, business, law or government.

Raskin has been at Trinity for 20 years, the first person specifically hired to be in the neuroscience program. Her undergraduate degree is in behavioral biology – "the nexus around the kinds of ways you can think about the nervous system" – and her graduate degree is in neuropsychology. She has a Ph.D. in neuropsychology.

"When I was looking for positions, because I've always been at that intersection between disciplines, most other colleges at the time were looking for someone in psychology or biology," she said. "Trinity had philosophy and engineering and chemistry – my position was going to be split between psychology and neuroscience. It's such a deep, interesting place to be."

The neuroscience program has "grown tremendously" since its inception, Raskin said, and is now often the largest science major at Trinity. Whereas she was the first faculty member hired with a split position, there are now five people split between neuroscience and another discipline. This year, the program hired its first full-time neuroscience faculty member. Other West Hartford residents who serve on the faculty are Kent Dunlap, a biology and neuroscience professor, and Elizabeth Casserly, who teaches in psychology and neuroscience.

"Trinity had one of the first undergraduate neuroscience majors back then."

–Sarah Raskin

In 2013, a five-year BA/MA program was added, with the fifth year largely devoted to completing a thesis based on a long-term research project. It is one of only four graduate programs at Trinity.

"We got our first physical neuroscience space a few years ago. It's the first time we really had a home," she said. "The college just announced [recently] that there's a new building going up that neuroscience will be going into."

Raskin said the program is "one of Trinity's real strengths" and represents both its willingness to try new things and its interdisciplinary nature.

On April 2, the neuroscience department will present "The Brain Event," a full-day celebration of its 25th anniversary. All alumni who graduated with a neuroscience degree were invited back, and the day will include talks from six alums and panels from alumni on potential career tracks.

David Tolin, who has been featured on A&E's "Hoarders," will give a talk about changing behavior and the brain with exposure therapy. The keynote address will be given by Joseph LeDoux of New York University, who has written many books on the brain, including his most recent, "Anxious: Using the Brain to Understand and Treat Fear and Anxiety."

West Hartford residents and alumni who will participate as the panelists are Dr. Susan Michelle Stone, class of 1995, who practices internal medicine through the Hartford HealthCare Medical Group; and Rocio Chang, class of 1994, assistant professor of psychiatry at the University of Connecticut. Also participating is former West Hartford resident Brian Harel, class of 1996, currently a professor at the Yale University School of Medicine's Child Study Center, but who has recently accepted a position at Pfizer in its neuroscience and pain unit as an associate clinical director.

The day's events are open to the public, Raskin said, and will serve as a companion piece for those who attended The Connecticut Forum's "The Science of Our Minds" program in March. For more information and to register for any of the events, visit www.trincoll.edu/Academics/MajorsAndMinors/Neuroscience/25/Pages/Events. **WHL**

John Marinelli photo courtesy of Trinity College

Trinity College President Joanne Berger-Sweeney, an accomplished neuroscientist, lectures in September 2015 as the school kicked off the neuroscience program's 25th anniversary celebration.

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A century and counting

Elmwood Senior Center celebrates 100th birthday of dedicated volunteer

by Abigail Albair
Executive Editor

For Victoria "Vicki" Heller, the secret to lifelong happiness is being around people.

The Elmwood Senior Center celebrated a century of living for Heller, one of its longtime volunteers, during a party Saturday, March 12.

The event was hosted by Heller's daughter and son, in conjunction with the Senior Center, and attended by more than 100 guests – nearly 60 of Heller's relatives and dozens of Senior Center members and volunteers.

Heller received a proclamation from the White House, one from Gov. Dannel Malloy's office and one from Mayor Scott Slifka. Each was read by one of Heller's grandchildren and each thanked her; the Obamas expressed gratitude for her "contribution to the American story" while Slifka's read "Your willingness to give so generously of your time and effort is an inspiration to us all." Malloy wished Heller a continued "rich life filled with cherished memories."

"She attends classes, educational programs and continues to grow as an individual. She is just a beautiful lady inside and out."
–Kathleen Faroni

All the fanfare was a bit overwhelming for Heller, who repeatedly stated her appreciation for the love and support of those around her, but humbly insisted that she simply loves what she does every day at the Senior Center – a place she has volunteered at for more than 30 years – where she serves as a coffee and Bingo volunteer as well as special events volunteer.

A giving person, Heller used the birthday gifts she received to make a $500 donation to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital.

Heller was born the oldest daughter to a family of 11 children in the Elmwood neighborhood of West Hartford and attended a two-room schoolhouse on New Park Avenue, Talcott Junior High and Hall High School during her years growing up in town. With the exception of 20 years spent living just over the town border in Hartford, she has always been a West Hartford resident, becoming a familiar face at town events, such as the Park Road Parade.

Courtesy photo

Victoria "Vicki" Heller graduated from Hall High in 1934. She has lived in town most of her life and is a regular Elmwood Senior Center volunteer.

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Professionally, Heller worked at Royal Typewriter, where she met her husband, and then Aetna, from which she eventually retired after 23 years of employment.

She traveled around much of North America and Europe, but always came home to the West Hartford house she continues to maintain. According to her children, she shoveled her own driveway and mowed her own lawn up until the age of 93.

"She's so active she's known as the Energizer bunny," Heller's son, Richard Heller, said, noting that when he does yard work for her "she's right there behind me with a rake."

Heller was an athletic teenager; she played field hockey at Hall High School. Her athletic nature never faded as she aged, and she took tap and line dancing classes at the Senior Center over the years and played Wii bowling.

Her friends at the Senior Center remarked during the party about how "sharp" Heller remains, how she doesn't appear to have aged in a decade and how lucky they are to have her in their lives.

"While we might not hit the 100 mark, she shows us each and every day is a blessing," Carol Lemieux said.

When her daughter, Nancy Burke, lost her husband four years ago, it was her mother whom she looked to as an example of how to move forward with her life.

"I saw how my mother did everything when dad died young," Burke said. "She has always been such a good role model for everything. She accepts life as it is."

Photo by Abigail Albair

Victoria "Vicki" Heller enjoyed the company of friends and family during a birthday celebration held for her March 12.

Richard Heller noted how many friends his mother has, while Vicki Heller reiterated how easy it is for her to maintain friendships at the Senior Center since she spends so much of her time there.

"I just like to be around people," she said with a smile.

Two of Heller's younger sisters, Virginia and Clare Cormier, are also senior center volunteers.

Heller has three grandchildren, two great grandchildren, two step-grandchildren and three step-great-granddaughters.

"She just epitomizes the strength, independence and the vibrancy that can continue through life," Elmwood Senior Center Director Kathleen Faroni said. "She attends classes, educational programs and continues to grow as an individual. She is just a beautiful lady inside and out."

Faroni recalled a day when Heller forgot to tell her senior center friends and co-workers that she would be arriving late, and by midday everyone was concerned about her whereabouts.

"She is such a part of our daily lives her absence was so noticeable," she said. "She's such an integral part of the Elmwood family."

Richard Heller said his mother is a "role model for everything" and, for him, "she sets an example for how I want to live," adding that she embraces life without fear.

Still, she had a bit of fear when it came to being the center of attention for her triple digit birthday, which officially is March 24.

"I told her, 'Don't be nervous, we'll be celebrating your 100th before you know it,'" Faroni said. "She really has a lot of life left to live." **WHL**

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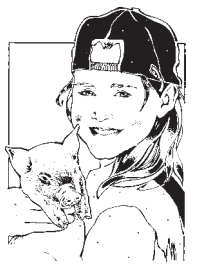

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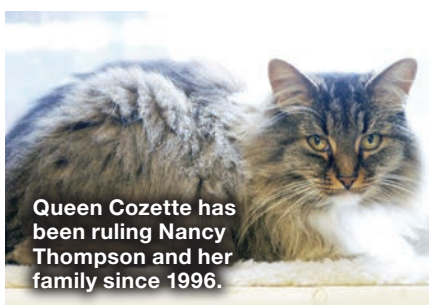


Queen Cozette has been ruling Nancy Thompson and her family since 1996.

Hanging with the queen

The U.S. is a democracy. Our tiny part of it, however, is a monarchy.

This has nothing to do with my love of all things British. It's because we share our home with Queen Cozette, a lovable little bundle of kitty fur who has owned us since the spring of 1996.

She's the boss and we are her subjects, and that's OK. We laugh when she bosses us around, often insisting that we sit in our – more like "her" – recliner with her red blanket on our lap. Right now, she's in my home office meowing and giving me what we call "the look," trying to order me to the living room for a catnap. Before long, I'll give in. Life around here is like that.

She tells us when she's hungry, when she wants one of her special treats, when she wants to cuddle, and when she thinks that whatever we're having for supper is more interesting than what she has on her plate. Most nights she announces her presence as she jumps on the bed, carefully placing her paws on my feet as she settles in.

We've been owned by a series of kitties over the past 40-something years, but she's been one of a kind, our little queen and, as far as these two loyal subjects are concerned, the best cat ever.

–Nancy Thompson, Editor
Glastonbury LIFE

Panther liked to hang out in the oddest places, such as dresser drawers.

Enter Panther

Many years ago, I was living in an apartment where a jet-black cat I called Panther often showed up outside. Pets were not allowed, so the best I could do was invite the little guy in for something to eat and a little affection. He enjoyed both and would hop on the bed and take a nap before heading back out.

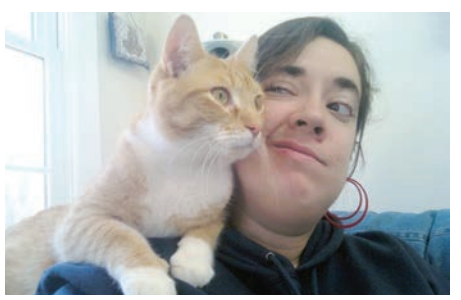
One day I came home and Panther was lying on the steps, unable to walk. He wasn't my cat, but how could I leave him there? So, I took him to a local veterinarian who told us a car had struck the feline. He would recover and he was ours, if we wanted him.

The vet was confident that Panther was a stray. So, we paid the bill, and an "illegal" cat became a part of the family.

Panther brought many years of great joy. He was extremely affectionate. He got into closets, dresser drawers, and one time nearly tumbled with the laundry when he climbed into the clothes dryer.

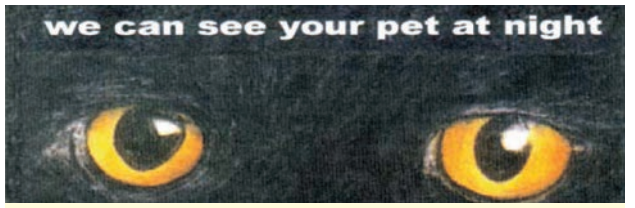
Only the tip of his tail poking out from all the socks and underwear kept him from taking a hot and bumpy ride.

–Mark Jahne, Editor Newington LIFE, Rocky Hill LIFE and Wethersfield LIFE



Oliver, the worst best cat there is

My cat, Oliver, is the worst. He scratches all the furniture, he terrorizes our other cat, Penelope, he cries



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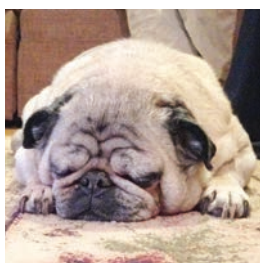
PETS

at 5 a.m. to be fed and if you don't walk out of the house backwards while staring at him, he will run past you to freedom in the great outdoors. To top it all off, he sheds more than any animal I've ever met, and it's impossible to sit anywhere without becoming coated in a thick layer of orange fur. Now that Oliver lives with my parents and I live in Hartford, my opinion has changed slightly. The memory of walking backwards out of my house is replaced by the days when I would come home saddened after a rough day and he would instinctually know to curl up on my lap or rub his nose across my cheek. I don't care how much hair I would have to remove from my jacket when I would come home and pick him up and he climbs onto my shoulders like a scarf. And the 5 a.m. feedings are manageable because, well, my dad does that.

My cat, Oliver, is the best, and I hope for that kind of annoying, unconditional love for everyone.

–Allie Rivera, Staff Writer

Earl the Pug



Our boy is now 13 years old. A few years ago he was diagnosed with hip dysplasia. He's gray around his muzzle, if you can believe a pug has a muzzle, and he is now deaf.

His curly tail still wags, his big, brown eyes still shine, and he has never, and I mean never, turned down food of any kind.

Through the years he has made us laugh with his antics and made me cry with his stubbornness (he is house trained, but there are days when he forgets that).

I'm pretty sure my husband and I have a few more years to spend with our curly tailed friend, but my heart is breaking at the thought of what is ahead.

Every now and then his hind legs give out and he stumbles. We can scream at him – telling him how much we love him or it's time to go inside – but he does not hear us or even look our way. I'm starting to research wheels for his backside that may help him get around. I've mentioned maybe we should build a ramp this spring so he can get in and out of the house.

I feel like I am getting way ahead of myself, but I know Earl the Pug is not getting any younger.

How can this little wee, wigglesome thing of a dog have gotten a hold of my I AM A CAT PERSON heart the way he has?

We might not always see eye to eye on things – "No, Earl, I am not getting up to get you another treat" and "There is not enough carpet cleaner in the world" issues, but Earl, I love you!

–Alicia B. Smith, Staff Writer

A horse is a horse

We have had one dog, three cats, a hamster, goldfish and hermit crabs in our household at once. All with unique personalities that seem to take over our home and personal lives, as they are a top priority. However, our number one priority is our largest pet of 17 hands (the height from the ground to the top of its back) that can't fit in our home, a Saddlebred horse.

The American Saddlebred is a horse breed from the United States. This breed was referred to as the "Horse America Made." Descended from riding-type horses bred at the time of the American Revolution, the American Saddlebred includes the Narragansett Pacer and Thoroughbred among its ancestors.

My wife rides in regional competitions with this pet named "McDreamy."

–Daniel Kornegay, Senior Graphic Designer

WHL

The Kornegay family has a number of pets, but none bigger than McDreamy, their American Saddlebred horse.

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Sit! Stay! Socialize!

Learning how to improve your pet's behavior

by Alicia B. Smith
Staff Writer

When it comes to training a dog, it is the human who needs the lessons.

Gaining an understanding of how dogs think and view the world as well as knowing your pet's personality is beneficial as well. When a dog is properly trained and socialized it can benefit not only the pet, but the owner's and animal's health, too.

"If you want a dog to respect you, you need to learn their language and communicate with them," Ben Garson, dog trainer at Dogology in Canton, said.

He and his staff of trainers are "training dogs one human at a time."

"I love dogs, and I love working with them, but a lot of what I do is working with people," he said of his business that offers group and individual training sessions at the shop or at home.

A common thing Garson runs into with pet owners is the idea that they know what they are doing in terms of training their dog because they had other dogs before.

"They think, I've had dogs all my life, you feed it, you take it for a walk," Garson said. "Sometimes the most dangerous things are things we don't know or assume we know. Really investigating and educating yourself on how to communicate with them is huge."

Garson said common mistakes people make when training their dog is to be too forceful and using a louder voice than is necessary. Things such as the way a person stands, moves or the energy in which a dog owner corrects their pet all impact whether a dog will be successfully trained.

Courtesy Photo

Leash training is one of many areas that can benefit a dog as well as offering socialization with other animals and people.

Garson said the best way to make training a success is to connect with their dog the way they connect with other dogs, with body language being a huge component.

"Those things come more natural to a dog," he said.

When the once adorable puppy grows into an older, less active senior dog, the pet's behavior may change as they develop age-related issues, such as joint pain or illness.

Garson said that older dogs have developed a pattern of behavior that they stick with, much the way a person does. He likened it to a person flipping a switch to turn on a light even though the power is out; the behavior has become a habit.

One of the things that pet owners should keep in mind when working with an older dog is that changing

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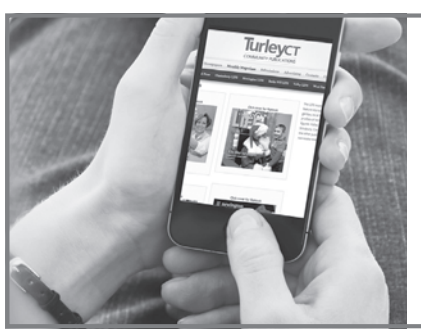

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their behavior can be stressful for the pet, and the dog should not feel pressured, that is why it might take more time to retrain a dog than to start fresh with a puppy.

"It's not impossible," Garson said.

What older dogs need is a person they can trust and respect and who will gently lead them into proper behavior.

"A lot of people confuse freedom with happiness, they think a dog who has no structure, no boundaries or rules is a happy dog," Garson said. "But, really, nowhere in life does that exist; kids raised without structure and boundaries tend to be miserable adults."

This is true for dogs as well.

"Socialization is one of the most crucial parts of raising any dog," Christian Suter, owner of Candlewyck Kennels in Glastonbury, said. "It's something owners should really make a point to work on. If you are having trouble with it, seek someone out."

Suter defined socialization as "being socialized with everything in their environment, this means cars, trains, trucks, all sorts of people, sounds, different smells, other dogs, anything they can encounter in its environment."

Suter said socializing a puppy should begin immediately when a puppy comes home to its new family, usually around 8 weeks old. To do so simply means introducing the puppy to anything in and around the house, including people and other pets.

"What you want to do is, if the puppy shows any fearfulness or uncertainty, you encourage it to overcome that," Suter said.

While starting immediately with a puppy is ideal, older dogs can also be socialized to feel better in their environment.

"You don't want to overwhelm the older dog. If it's fearful of something – other dogs, running cars – you want to help that dog and encourage this dog to be more confident in that situation. When older dogs fear something, they often had a negative experience in the past," Suter said.

Candlewyck Kennels offers doggy day care, which Suter said, can be an excellent way to help socialize dogs. Puppies are put in a separate area where they are first introduced to other young dogs about the same size. As the dog adjusts to all these new canine friends, he or she will eventually move into the area with more dogs.

"I think it's important for an owner to understand how a dog learns," Suter said. "If you understand that, it helps you tremendously in socializing and getting to know your dog and working with your dog."

"I am a big proponent of socialization and training," Dr. Monica Dijanic, medical director at Beaver Brook Animal Hospital in Wethersfield, said.

She has heard statistics ranging from 30 to 65 percent of dogs are surrendered to shelters because of behavioral issues. It does not have to be this way.

For starters, training your pet, Dijanic said, helps to establish a human-animal bond and it prevents the pet owner from becoming frustrated. It also helps keep pets healthy.

"If you have an untrained dog that eats your Thanksgiving turkey, you will not only have an upset family, but foreign body issues, GI upset; there are health ramifications," Dijanic said. Additionally, if a dog is trained to come at their name, it can keep them safe if they should get out of the house or off leash.

"The big one people talk about is the human-animal bond; you will be bonding with a much more well-behaved dog or cat," Dijanic said. Issues such as a cat urinating outside of its litter box or a dog that constantly jumps on people can be prevented with proper training.

Dijanic recommends pet owners sign up for dog training classes.

"I've been in the veterinarian field for over 25 years," she said. "When I get a new dog, I do training classes. It's a nice refresher and bonding time, something you and your pet can do together."

Classes, even for those who have attended before, help to introduce new techniques that may be unfamiliar to pet owners.

While dogs are the most common pet to benefit from training, Dijanic stressed that cats, too, can benefit. Typically, they will train themselves to use a litter box, but pet owners can help train them to not scratch furniture by having a scratching post available or using pheromones to help keep cats calmer.

Pet owners should not be worried about training older dogs either. They really can learn new tricks.

"Even with older pets, I would not let that deter people," she said of offering ways to help an older animal adjust to new surroundings. **WHL**

Looking to adopt? Here is a list of area rescues

Boot n' Kit Canine Rescue, Farmington Valley
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(Dogs only)

Dog Star Rescue, Farmington Valley
Dogstarrescue.org
Facebook.com/dogstar
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cthumane.org
(Variety of animals)

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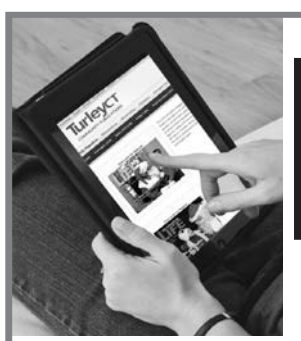
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News and notes

Chinese to be offered in middle schools

Starting in the 2016-17 school year, sixth-grade students at all three middle schools will have the option to take classes in Mandarin as a foreign language in addition to their current choices of French and Spanish. Presently offered only at the high school level, Chinese is a language that world language supervisor Lucy Cartland called "unquestionably a critical 21st century international language."

Town to take 'SMART' approach to waste management

Plans for a "pay as you throw" waste disposal system – although preliminary – were the topic of conversation at a recent Town Council's Community Planning and Physical Services Committee meeting. The unit-based pricing for waste disposal would essentially convert waste management to a utility cost for residents. The program will encourage proper segregation of materials to help develop clean waste and recycled material streams.

Feedback sought on Bike Facilities Plan draft

The Department of Community Services is seeking feedback on its draft Bicycle Facilities plan and network map generated as a result of the Complete Streets Policy that was adopted by the Town Council last summer. The department is seeking eedback, which can be sent to Town Planner Todd Dumais by email at todd.dumais@westhartfordct.gov. Surveys on resident bike habits must be completed by April 6 and are accessible via www.surveymonkey.com/r/LWCD6R5 or on the towns website.

Residents continue vocal opposition of MDC plan

West Hartford residents were among the many who testified before the state Planning and Development Committee at the state Capitol in support of Senate Bill 422, which would combat what many have highlighted as negative impacts of a planned Niagara Bottling plant coming to Bloomfield. Residents continued to express concerns with how the new plant may impact Metropolitan District Commission member towns.

Budget proposal carries tax hike of 1.9 percent

Under the proposed fiscal year 2016-17 budget, taxes will rise 1.9 percent, which Town Manager Ron Van Winkle said is "one of the lowest tax increases we've had in some time." The budget totals $269.3 million, an expenditure increase of $11.3 million or 4.4 percent. Capital financing represents $16.2 million, or 6 percent of the total budget, while the town side equals $99.5 million or 37 percent of the total. The Board of Education budget equals 57 percent.

Bluemercury opens in West Hartford Center

The previous location of Lululemon on the corner of Farmington Avenue and LaSalle Road in West Hartford Center is now home to the state's fifth location of Bluemercury, a makeup, skin care and spa destination.

Courtesy photo

Ryan Rempe and Ashlee Albert to wed

High school sweethearts Ryan Rempe and Ashlee Albert are engaged to be married. Ryan and Ashlee met at Hall High School. A long-lasting friendship bloomed into love. Ryan is employed by Local 638B Steam Fitters Union in New York City, and Ashlee is employed at a dental office, also in New York City. A fall wedding is planned. **WHL**

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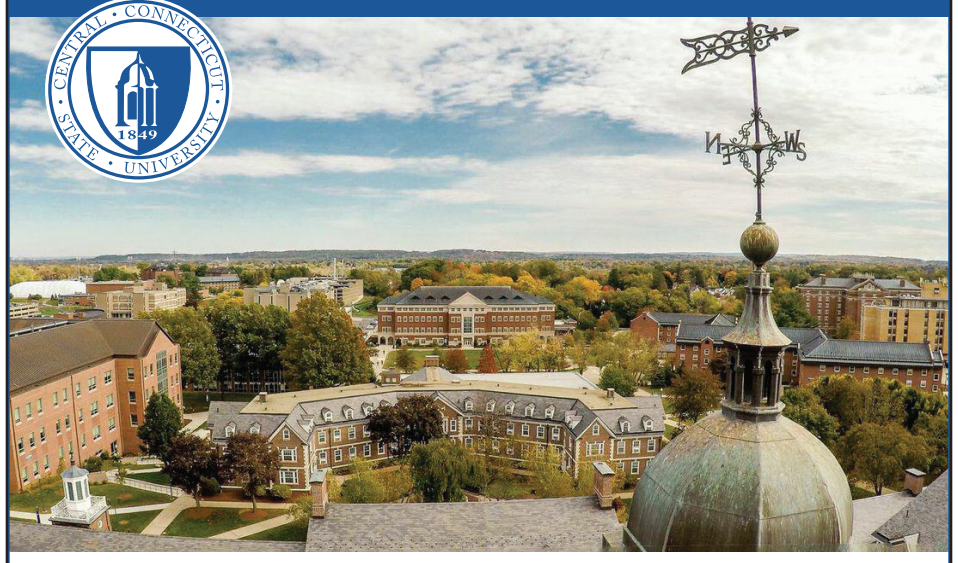

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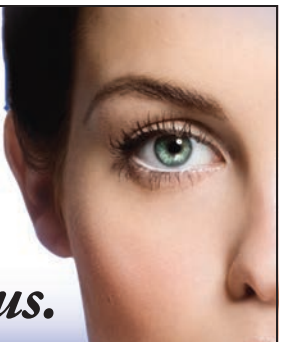

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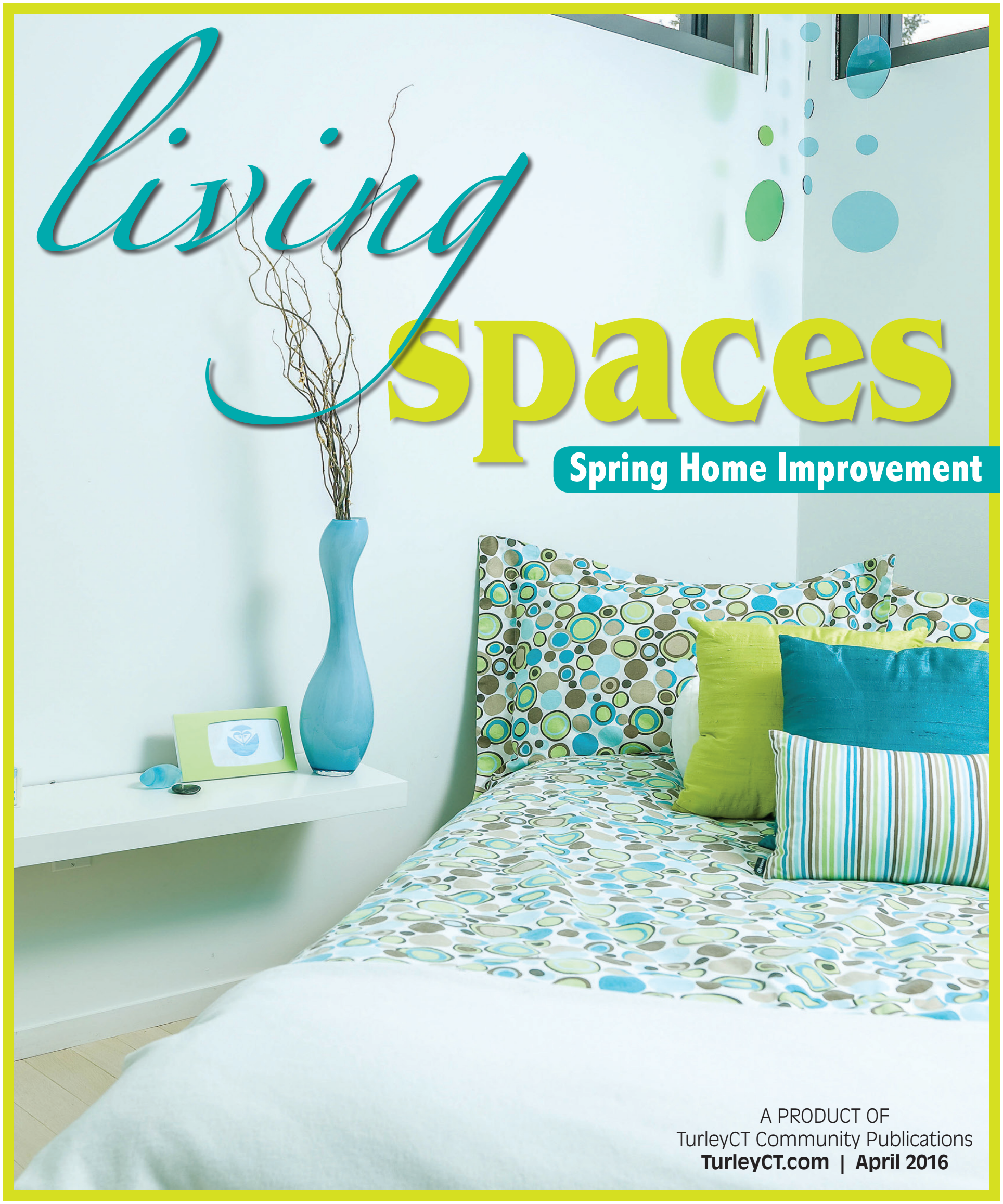
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Staging to stay

Experts offer advice on how to fall in love with your home again

by Alicia B. Smith
Staff Writer

Infinite Home clients remade their bedroom into a warm and inviting space with new furniture and a rug. The fireplace came from another room in their house.

Courtesy photos

You loved it enough to buy your home all those years ago, but time has taken the gleam off the old abode and now you are ready to get out.

Circumstances require that some people move, but for those who truly would rather stay put but are tired of the same old furniture and fixings – there's a solution. Learn ways to make your home fresh and fall in love with it all over again.

Home stagers assist clients in making their houses beautiful so that potential buyers will envision themselves living in the space and make an offer. Their tips and techniques can also help you see your home in a new light.

Tamatha Wolfel, stager and owner of Infinite Home Design in Wethersfield, said, "There are many ways you can freshen up your house if you want to put in the time; it can change the entire look."

When working with clients to sell their home, Wolfel suggests decluttering, removing odors and cleaning windows.

"The first rule of thumb is if it's seven years old, it should go," Wolfel said. "That is the cycle of trends."

Another detractor is clutter, no matter what kind – magazines, clothing or odd collections of stuff – because clutter makes a space look dated and smaller than it actually is. Wolfel suggests using bags to sort items: one for things to keep,

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one for things that can be sold and another for items to throw out.

This is also a great time to go through the home and bring in new accessories, from curtains and throw pillows to new lamps, or just new lampshades and centerpieces. Accessories can update a space and add pops of color and texture all for a relatively small monetary investment. Sometimes all it can take is rearranging the art on the walls.

"The first rule of thumb is if it's seven years old, it should go. That is the cycle of trends."

– Tamatha Wolfel, Infinite Home Design

For those with some more time, painting rooms with a fresh coat of paint and even a new color is another way to make a huge impact.

"Painting is one of the best ways to freshen up a room," Wolfel said.

And paint can be applied to more than just walls. Wolfel said that a fresh coat of paint on a wooden piece of furniture, along with some new handles, changes the look and feel of a room.

Chalkboard paint is big now and adding some to the surface of a coffee table is a fun way to update the piece.

"If you have a dark wood set from the '80s, it's solid wood and beautiful and you don't want to throw it away, do it with chalk paint and put some new handles on it and you have a whole new set," she said.

With a bit of muscle and a few hours, rearranging furniture is another option – keeping in mind the less is more philosophy. Using fewer pieces of furniture in a space gives it a modern look.

Sometimes the placement of items is the change maker. Keeping a less cluttered mantel is important. If there are bookcases in the room, rearrange the books so they are not strictly lined up horizontally on the shelves, rather, have a mix of horizontal and vertical books and add a decorative item or a vase next to a stack of books.

"A shelf that goes all the way across is not conducive to a fresh, modern look," Wolfel said.

Kitchens and bathrooms are still important to selling homes and Wolfel advised they not be overlooked when staging your own home to stay.

"I've seen the backsplash make and break deals," she said.

If it's too busy or gaudy, change it to something more contemporary.

Older cabinets can be a turnoff when selling a house, so chances are good that they are also not appealing to the homeowner either. They can be updated with a fresh coat of paint and new hardware.

Old counters? Apply a granite coating to create the look of this luxurious material, Wolfel suggested.

To update the bathroom, paint the old wooden vanity and buy new curtains; using only white towels "just makes it seem fresh and new," she said.

Other suggestions include painting the front door for a fresh and inviting

Courtesy photos

Danielle Needle was able to refresh this bathroom by removing outdated wallpaper, adding new lighting and getting rid of curtains that made the room dark.

feeling for you, not just your guests.

When working with clients, Wolfel will walk with them through each room of their home. Often, initially, they are hesitant to make changes, but by the time they get to the third room, Wolfel said they begin to understand why staging is important. Wolfel suggested letting a good, trusted friend go through your home with you and make suggestions.

"The thing is," she said, "even stagers, when we go to sell our house, we get other stagers to do it; we are just so used to our surroundings we justify it all and say OK. It's always good to get an outside view, someone who is not critical. They may come up with something you never thought of before."

A thorough inventory of a home's contents can help identify pieces that might work better in another space.

For those who might feel intimidated about the process or feel they don't have the design chops to make a difference, there is hope.

Simsbury-based Danielle Needle, a professional home stager and redesign consultant who also works as a realtor, suggests homeowners start by doing some research. Looking through home and garden magazines or searching online can help identify appealing designs to replicate.

"I think people feel they don't have enough space," Needle said, noting that a space can feel confining due to furniture placement and traffic patterns.

For Needle, who owned her own home staging company in Florida, the biggest thing a homeowner can do is "lighten and brighten."

This could mean something as simple as putting brighter light bulbs in lamps, adding new lighting or swapping out dark window treatments for lighter ones.

Paint, too, can go a long way to making an impact. It can help brighten up a room, and Needle suggested staying with neutral colors.

"Just putting on a neutral color makes a world of difference," she said.

Look down, too – at the flooring. Old carpet can make a space feel uninspired. If it's not possible to remove older carpeting, Needle suggested having it professionally cleaned, which will brighten it up and help with any odors that may be lurking. If one is able to install new flooring, selecting lighter colors will make a difference.

There are easy and reasonably priced ways to make the bathroom and kitchen stand out, too. Needle said laminate countertops could be

painted, as can cabinets, which will have a big impact.

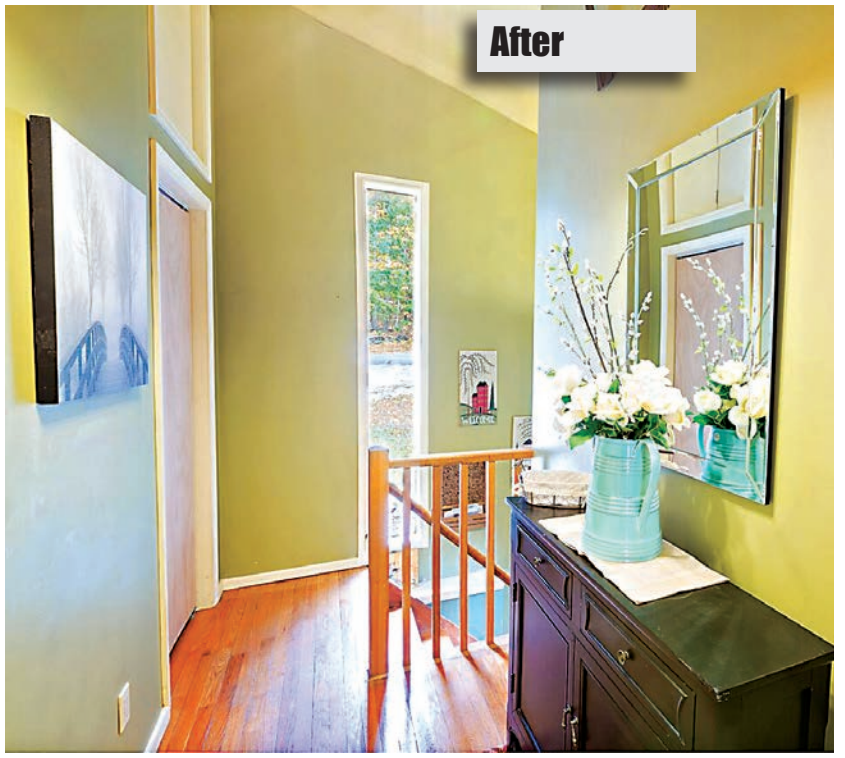
Adding new hardware also helps. If the budget allows, investing in new, updated appliances is another way to go.

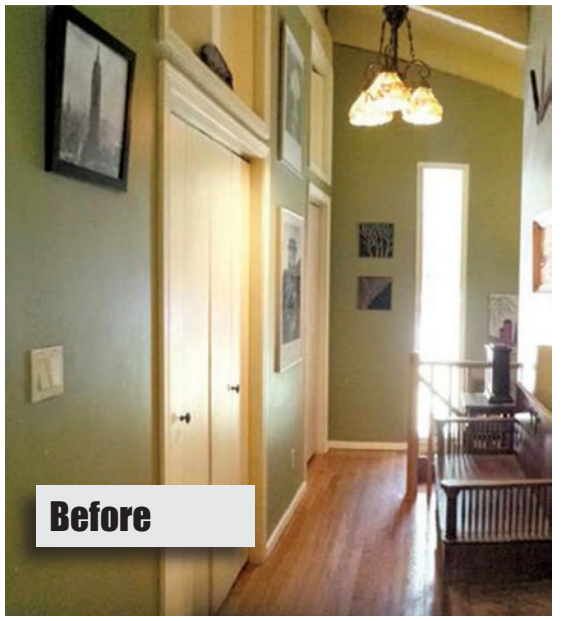
For the bathrooms, Needle suggested putting in a pedestal sink, explaining it's new and takes up less space.

There are other simple projects that Needle has done herself that can make a change for the better.

If there is a piece of furniture that might be dated but has sentimental value, adding a new slipcover is an option.

Any artwork that home-





Polishing wood, washing windows and swapping out old pieces for a beveled mirror, a narrow console and a small area rug make for a more modern entry.

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owners love can have a fresh new vibe by just swapping the frame or painting the one it already has.

"They have that 'aha' moment, 'I never thought to do that,'" is often the response Needle hears from clients. "They are actually really grateful you helped them with a vision."

The vision shared by Ridgewood Designs co-owners Leslie Ryan and Libby Gallant includes softer colors and decluttering. Twenty years of experience has enabled them to make quick suggestions on how to fall in love with your home all over again.

Paint goes a long way toward updating a home, Ryan said, noting that gray is a popular color along with softer coastal colors.

"The trend is no longer the Crayola crayon box colors where every room is a different color," she said. Rather, choose one soft color and paint the rooms the same throughout the home.

Gallant suggested replacing old wallpaper, explaining that although wallpaper is in at the moment, painting is better, quicker and less expensive.

Decluttering is another way to improve the look of a home. That includes moving out extra furniture, clearing off shelves, removing outdated window treatments and taking everything off the refrigerator.

"Sometimes nothing is better than something," Ryan said.

It would be a good idea to deep clean the house as well, have carpets shampooed, or better yet, if there is hardwood underneath, remove the carpet all together.

Updating photographs on display also goes a long way in keeping things fresh.

"If your kids are in college and you still have their baby pictures out, it's time for a fresh look," Gallant said.

When switching out photos, it would be a good time to swap the frames, too, and opt for matching frames rather than a mix of colors or styles.

Those that match will help create a composed collection, Ryan said.

Other ideas include having any popcorn ceilings in the home skim coated and painting the ceiling with clean, white paint.

Changing out light fixtures, Gallant said, was another way to update a room's look. They echoed other experts, saying time and money spent in the kitchen is well spent.

Gallant suggested painting the cabinets gray or white for a fresh and clean look.

For "an amazing transformation" in the bathroom, Ryan suggested giving the old pink, green or orange tub a white surface. To freshen up a room, Gallant proposed adding pops of color with pillows and throws that can be purchased at any number of places.

"When we go to stage a home, sometimes it does happen. People come back and say, 'Wow, I don't want to leave,'" Ryan said. **WHL**

> **"The trend is no longer the Crayola crayon box colors where every room is a different color."**
>
> **– Leslie Ryan, Ridgewood Designs**

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Ask the experts

The LIFE papers asked local real estate experts a few questions related to the current real estate market. Here is what they had to say:

Q. What advice do you have for buyers and sellers in the current market?

A. "Here is my advice to buyers and sellers in today's market: do not wait. Sellers: many homeowners feel that prices will go higher and so they'd like to wait for that. Anyone who bought in 2007 or before bought at the height of the real estate market and are eagerly waiting for those prices to return. Some homeowners like to wait until the "spring market." In the winter months, inventory is typically lower, therefore there is less competition. In the spring, there is always a flood on homes coming on the market and now you are competing with much more inventory. Buyers: when the market is busiest in the spring, do not hesitate to make an offer on a home you love. Chances are one or more other buyers are also in love with that home. By waiting, two things can happen: the house gets sold while you are waiting, or you get into a multiple offer situation."

-Rosemary Gunning, sales manager, Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage, West Hartford

A. "My advice for buyers is to narrow down your search to what is manageable. Pick your top three towns and start there. Stay within a tight price range with no more than a $25,000-$30,000 variance. Additionally, try to look beyond the minor cosmetic issues that can make a house look dated. You might be passing up a gem just because it doesn't have that Pottery Barn look. Lastly, don't wait too long to make the offer when you see what you want. If you perceive it to be a good deal, someone else will too and then you could end up in a bidding war. For sellers, come out of the gate with your house looking its absolute best. Clear out the clutter, remove excess furniture in rooms and make the house sparkle so it is "showroom ready." If you can improve the look of a room by just painting it or removing some wallpaper, do it. Even minor cosmetic work can lower the final sale price of your home by thousands of dollars if buyers perceive it as needing "a lot of work." Price your house aggressively. This is no market to speculate; and the longer that house sits on the market, the lower the final sale price."

-Joanne Breen, broker/owner, ERA Sargis-Breen Real Estate Co., Newington

A. "My advice is to be flexible. The market is in transition. There are homes that are going under contract with multiple offers right away and there are homes that are still sitting for many months. Buyers and sellers should heed the advice of their licensed agent and be prepared to adjust their buying and selling goals accordingly. Overall, the market is heading up, so it is a

LIVING Spaces

"When the market is busiest in the spring, do not hesitate to make an offer on a home you love. Chances are one or more other buyers are also in love with that home."
-Rosemary Gunning

great time to buy with rates still at historic lows."

-Robert L. Levine, broker/owner, Hart Real Estate LLC, West Hartford

Q. What misconceptions are common among buyers and sellers?

A. "There are many real estate Internet sites that purport to be the resource to use to estimate value of the home you are selling or buying. While they can be helpful tools, the best way to understand the current real estate climate and get a more accurate value on your home is to use the professional services of a licensed Realtor. A misconception is that sellers and buyers net more money not using a Realtor. In fact, statistics show that sellers who use Realtors net more money. Buyers who use a buyer's agent are more successful in attaining their real estate goals."

-Margaret Wilcox, Realtor, William Raveis, Glastonbury

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Elliot from Hartford, 2015

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Thompson from Farmington Valley, 2015

A. "The biggest one buyers and sellers have regarding our business is about how agents get paid. Most people seem to think the agent gets the whole commission for him or herself. In reality, the commission is split up between several entities. In the end, the agent may only make 1 or 2 percent of a 6 percent commission. Out of this, the agents pay all their expenses, including the cost of equipment necessary to run their businesses. Any additional professional training that agents take is also their financial responsibility. Our industry has high business and ethical standards, to which agents pledge to adhere. An agent cannot risk losing his/her license by unethical behavior, even when asked by a client to do so (which happens more often than one might guess). Another common misconception right now, specifically held by buyers, is that if they sign a Buyer Representation Agreement with a broker to look at properties, they will be obligated to pay the commission if they buy one. In fact, 99.99 percent of the time, the seller still pays the total commission for rentals as well as property sales."

-Jane von Holzhausen, manager, Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage, Avon

A. "The most common misconception among sellers today is that prices are on the rise. In fact, they are flat and even trending down for the past several years. The volume of sales statewide was up nearly 20 percent in 2015, but the median value of homes statewide was down nearly 5 percent. In January 2016, sales were up almost 25 percent from last January, but the median sales price was still flat. Another common misconception of sellers is that the process to sell their property will be drawn out. If a property is priced accurately, the average number of days on market is under 30 days, and there are actually homes that are receiving multiple bids. There is a shortage of good inventory in today's marketplace. As far as buyers go, the most common misconception is that the house they will buy will be perfect. Buyers are taking home inspection reports too literally. Sellers are not willing to upgrade every item in their home just because they aren't brand new in order to consummate a sale. This situation is creating negotiating difficulties between buyers and sellers."

-Mike Tracy, office leader, Berkshire Hathaway New England Properties, Newington

Q. What trends in pricing have you noticed over the last six months?

A. "Prices on homes that are in good condition and priced right are increasing. They are selling very quickly, especially in the first time homebuyer range: $175,000-$350,000. It's very competitive and sellers are paying attention. There are a lot of buyers out there, and not a vast amount of inventory. However, buyers are still not willing to pay whatever the seller wants. They are very informed and set ideals for what they can pay."

-Tracey McCleary, office manager, Re/Max Precision, Newington

Q. How are current mortgage rates impacting buying and selling?

A. "The current rates are still amazing, but the fact is they are rising, and if someone is planning on getting into a house, now is the time to do it. As long as the buyer gets a standard, non-variable rate, even though taxes and other expenses will go up over time, your interest rate won't. The rates still are so low that paying down the principle of a loan is much easier and makes owning a home affordable."

-Tracey McCleary, office manager, Re/Max Precision, Newington **WHL**

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Spring cleaning

Make the most of this annual ritual

Compiled by Lynn Woike

Area experts offer tricks of the trade when tackling spring cleaning.

"Break down spring cleaning projects into tasks that can be managed in the time you have available. It could be a room at a time, or even one drawer or one shelf a day. This method prevents you from becoming overwhelmed and allows you to better focus on a particular task." *Heather Feinsinger, owner, Re-Style Your Closets LLC, Simsbury*

"Assemble a cleaning basket or bucket with all the supplies you'll need. Carry it from room to room to tackle jobs both big and small so you'll have all your gear in one handy container." *Sarah Soboleski, owner, Classically Organized, Glastonbury*

"The products you use can help with the cleaning process. I really love straight alcohol on mirrors because of the residue build-up from hair products and makeup. It also works well on glass shower door soap scum with baking soda and a Magic Eraser. Just be careful that there is not a sealant on the shower door and do not get any on brass framing or wood." *Sandy Wheeler of Morawski Cleaning LLC, West Simsbury*

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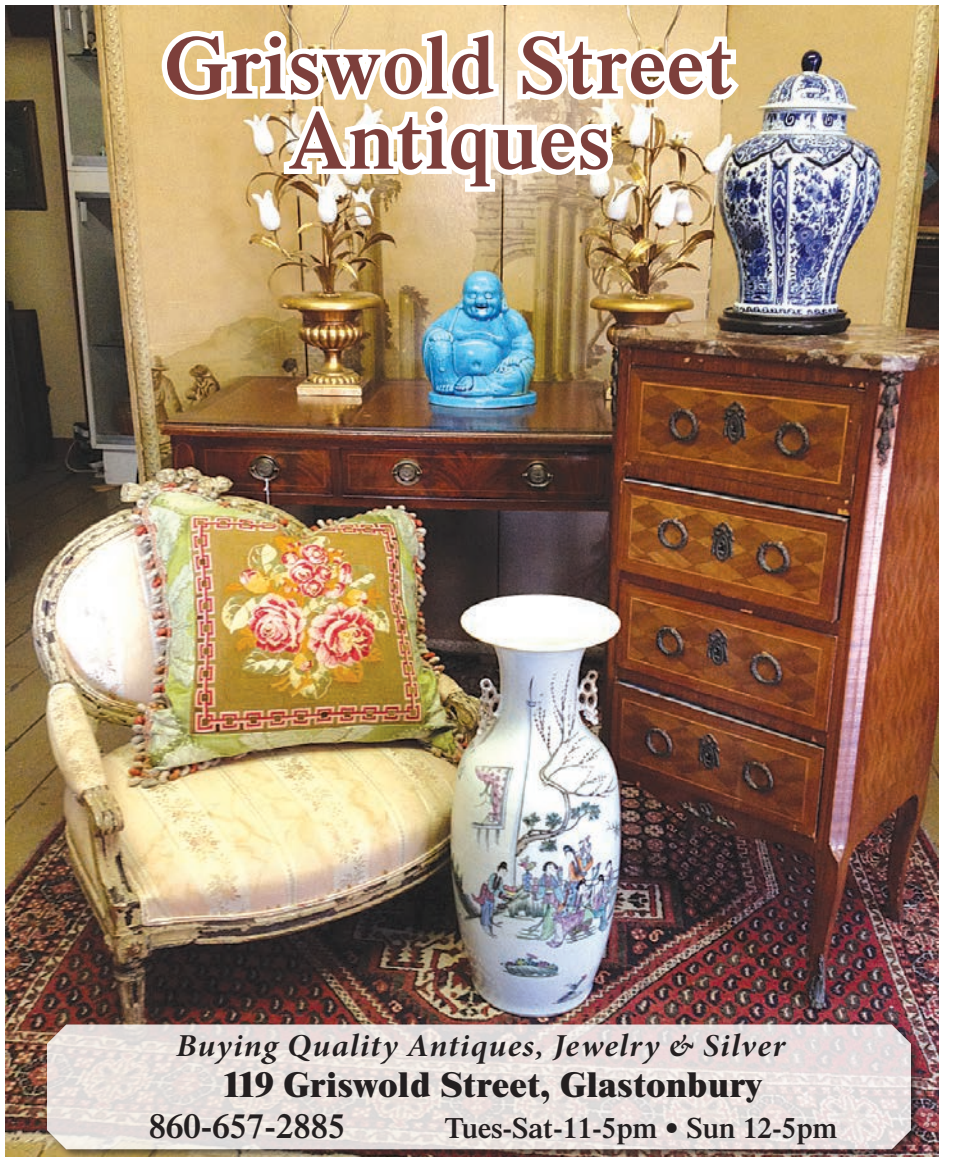


LIVING Spaces

"If you haven't worn it in a year, toss it. Also, toss it if you don't absolutely love it. Don't try to convince yourself you're going to wear that bridesmaid dress again when you hated wearing it the first time."
Mike Pendergast, owner, Great Closets of New England, Simsbury

"Pick one corner in the room as your starting point and move in a circular path from there. Always start on high surfaces and work your way down to the floor."
Sarah Soboleski, owner, Classically Organized, Glastonbury

"Devise a cleaning schedule once the bulk of the spring cleaning is done so it won't seem so daunting next year: mudroom on Mondays, toilets and tubs on Tuesdays, workspace on Wednesdays, etc."
Sarah Soboleski, owner, Classically Organized, Glastonbury

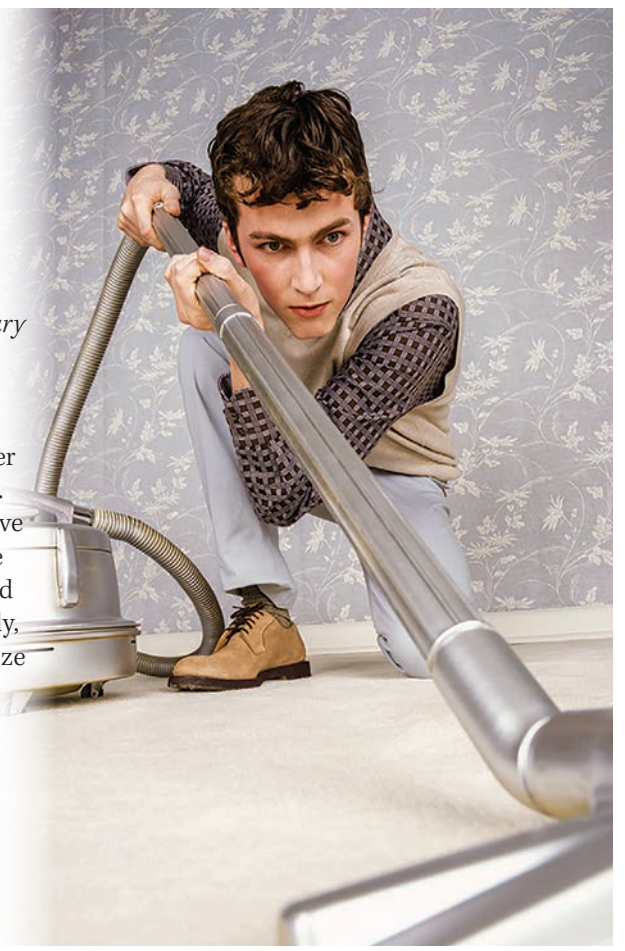
"Toss expired foods and spices in the pantry. Sanitize the refrigerator and freezer. Reorganize the pantry, cupboards, refrigerator and freezer, rotating soon-to-expire ingredients to the front. Sanitize fridge and freezer."
Emily Weissberg, owner, Organize Me! By Emily Weissberg, Avon

"Groove to some upbeat music while you work. A few good tunes will keep you moving and boost your spirits. The 'Frozen' movie theme song 'Let it Go' comes to mind as you release the dust and clutter from your home."
Sarah Soboleski, owner, Classically Organized, Glastonbury

"Identify a spot for donations. As you begin your spring cleaning, it's always good to purge any unwanted or unloved items you find. It helps to have a box or bag to corral these things to take to your local charity. Continue to use the spot throughout the year so you make it a habit to place your castoffs in this designated location."
Sarah Soboleski, owner, Classically Organized, Glastonbury

"When handling large projects such as a garage, choose a corner and focus only on that one area. Discard the true garbage. Remove unwanted items that have some value and can be sold or donated and place them elsewhere. Lastly, create a better system to organize and store what's left."
Donna Finocchiaro, owner, Organized East of the River, Marlborough **WHL**

Next month we suggest how and where to get rid of items you no longer want or need.



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Compiled by Lynn Woike

Create order from chaos throughout your house with these helpful organizing tips from local experts.

Boxes

"For organization, I like boxes and bins, but the important thing is for the contents to be 'transparent.' I don't mean that the box or bin needs to be clear, only that labeling is crucial.

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LIVING Spaces

If you have small children who you'd like to encourage to pick up after themselves, placing pictures of the items contained in the bins can help. And before you think about throwing everything in the bins just to clean up the house, purge first. Do you really need 10 cell phone chargers?"
–Monica Katzen, owner, Mind My Life, Simsbury

Suitcases

"Vintage suitcases are great for storage – they can be stacked and used as an end table or nightstand next to a sofa or bed. They can hold anything from remote controls and magazines to sheets and towels for guests."
–Arlene Carr, owner, Revival Home, West Hartford

Baskets

"Easily retrieve items stored in your pantry, refrigerator, craft closet or playroom with these grab-and-go baskets. You can purchase them at most big box stores and they come in different colors and sizes."
–Sarah Soboleski, owner, Classically Organized, Glastonbury

Clear bins

"My favorite products are clear Sterilize bins with white lids. They come in many sizes, are affordable, stack well and fit portable shelving units typically used in basements, garages and closets. I place content labels on one long and one short side for easy viewing. Use the large 56-quart bins for soft goods – clothing, stuffed animals, bedding – and the 20-quart ones for light bulbs, extension cords, candles, paper goods and other items."
–Donna Finocchiaro, owner, Organized East of the River, Marlborough

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Door Rack

"Organizers that go over or behind doors are a boon for people with limited space. These often overlooked areas can be used to store almost anything, including shoes, pantry items, cleaning supplies and craft materials." *–Heather Feinsinger, owner, Re-Style Your Closets LLC, Simsbury*

Hooks

"Garage storage space is limited for most of us and it usually houses odd-shaped tools as well. To maximize the space, use walls effectively. Hooks are a perfect way to get things off the floor." *–Mike Pendergast, owner, Great Closets of New England, Simsbury*

LIVING Spaces

Chinese boxes

"Everything from paper clips, cotton balls and tea to sewing supplies can be neatly organized in a collection of colorful antique Chinese cloisonne boxes. They look great on a desk or dresser." *–Arlene Carr, owner, Revival Home, West Hartford.*

Lockers

"Putting lockers by your daily entrance gives everyone in the family a place to store items that come and go regularly – from coats and gloves to backpacks and sporting equipment. Durable and fun, lockers come in a variety of styles that can also help organize mud rooms, game rooms, bedrooms, bathrooms and garages." *–Paul Calafiore, owner, DreamMaker Bath and Kitchen, Newington* **WHL**

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A sense of style

Experts offer advice on combining objects to create a beautiful space

by Sloan Brewster
Staff Writer

A room is like a canvas.

Sometimes putting a masterpiece on the canvas means starting with all new things, but often it can be done by painting with a mishmash of items acquired over a lifetime.

The first step, according to Kellie Burke of Kellie Burke Interiors in West Hartford, is to do some editing, meaning getting rid of some of the pieces that won't lend themselves to creating a beautiful room.

"You have to look for scale," she said. "You have to make sure all the pieces in there aren't the same size."

Pieces of the same height and dimensions will just make the room look cluttered.

"Get a few very big pieces. That's going to be the thing that solidifies the room," Burke said. "Those are the starting pieces."

Use a rug to balance it all and create a frame around the room with the larger pieces, but use the right rug.

"The worst thing to have is a lot of little pieces of furniture and a small rug," Burke said.

If there's a special small rug among the things the homeowner is planning to keep, the way to deal with it is to place it atop a larger rug and balance it with the rest of the items in the room.

Burke suggests going through smaller pieces to find items that will create a flow.

"You need your eye to stop and set in different spots," she said. "You really need to edit and know how to draw your eye from the large, the medium, to the small."

Burke used her ideas to make some changes in her bedroom.

"I have this mélange of crazy in my bedroom," she said. "What I did specifically in my place was I laid out the items that were most important."

She sorted the pieces by genre, look, color and feel. She had lots of pieces of art, which she edited down by color. She was less concerned with the style or designs of art. What mattered to her was if she could blend the colors and frames together to create a flow.

She lined up the frames on the wall, hanging them at the same level, working at creating the look she wanted; it took eight hours.

"I sort of made a gallery through the room," Burke said. "Oddly, it worked."

Peter Robbin, owner and senior designer at LCR in West Hartford, also compared a room to a painting.

Robbin started with the idea of color, pointing out that from room to room, the current color matters.

"To have a purple background and next door an orange background, it's a difficult start," Robbin said. "Think about a house as a total, the whole thing is a painting. ... One has to think about the bigger picture. One has to consider the background palette of the whole house to start a flow, and this is before one even thinks about objects."

"The warmth or coolness is an important concept. If you mix, you have to mix with serious intention."
– Peter Robbin

Color and material are ways to create a good mix with eclectic pieces.

"You want to take inventory of the materials and colors," Robbin said. "Use those commonalities to tie things together."

Make sure pieces that contrast with one another work together.

"You have to take inventory of whether or not it is warm or cool,"

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Robbin said. "Gold leaf, yellow, rusted iron are warm. Polished chrome, white metal, glass and the color blue are cool in nature. ... Be aware that you're either using a cool palette together or if mixing that you do it with intention."

He repeated that concept a few times, pointing out that there are no hard and fast rules and compared the process again to putting a dab of color on a canvas.

"The warmth or coolness is an important concept," he said. "If you mix, you have to mix with serious intention. Sometimes a rusted iron next to silver leaf, they set off each other and present the best of the differences and, sometimes, if you have rust next to silver leaf, it just makes the rust look old or the silver leaf look too new."

Burke and Robbin agreed the trick is in viewing the room.

"This is all done with the eye," Robbin said, "moving things around and seeing how one object looks next to another." **WHL**

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How to make spring projects more *eco-friendly*

The arrival of warmer weather means different things to different people. Some anticipate opportunities for outdoor fun, while others may be considering redecorating or remodeling their homes. For the latter group, home improvement season provides a great opportunity to make homes more eco-friendly.

When planning home improvement projects, it's best to first choose a project and then look for ways to make the project more environmentally friendly. Such an approach may not only benefit the environment, but it also may benefit homeowners' bottom lines.

Interior decorating

Longer days and warmer temperatures often translate into wanting to freshen up the interior of a home. Heavy draperies and comforters are put away, and lighter fabrics are taken out of storage. Whenever possible, reuse or repurpose items you already have rather than purchasing new items.

Longer drapes can be cut and hemmed to be used as window treatments in other rooms. Making a patchwork blanket out of old T-shirts is a crafty project that makes use of items that would otherwise be destined for landfills.

When laundering linens, skip the energy-using dryer and let items line dry in the sun and fresh air.

If you decide to purchase some new items, look for products made from sustainable or organic fabrics. Hemp and bamboo textiles have grown in popularity. Hemp and bamboo plants grow quickly, and their durability makes these materials smart choices.

When replacing items around the house, donate older items to a charitable organization.

Flowers and plants

Spring and summer call to mind beautiful blooming plants. Relying on native, sustainable plants is practical, environmentally friendly and cost-effective.

According to the National Wildlife Federation, sustainable plants are native plants. Native plants sustain local wildlife more effectively than non-native alternatives, so include native plants in your sustainable garden. Native plants also are less reliant on pesticides and herbicides to keep them healthy and viable.

Don't forget to bring plants indoors as well. Even though you may be opening the windows more, indoor plants can filter and purify indoor air. The NASA Clean Air Study, led in association with the Associated Landscape Contractors of America, found that certain common indoor plants naturally remove toxic agents such as benzene, formaldehyde and trichloroethylene from the air. Efficient air cleaning is accomplished with at least one plant per 100 square feet of home or office space.

Proper disposal

Spring cleaning is another tradition for many families come the end of winter and dawn of spring.

Many people use spring as a time to go through closets and garages to remove items they no longer use or need. In an effort to clean up fast, some people may dispose of chemical products, paints, treated lumber, and many other items in ways that can be damaging to the environment. Always learn local municipal guidelines for proper disposal of potentially harmful products. Area recycling centers may have drop-off areas for stains and paints, used motor oil and other potentially harmful products.

Before discarding something, see if it can be donated or sold. This will result in fewer items ending up in landfills.

Exercise caution outdoors as well. Runoff from cleaning products used on home siding or driveways can leach into the surrounding soil or find its way into sewage drains that ultimately direct fluids to public waterways. Choose environmentally responsible products whenever possible.

Springtime renovation and cleaning projects provide the perfect opportunity to adopt eco-friendly practices that pay dividends for years to come. **WHL**

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Guidebooks

With spring here it is time to get outdoors! These handy guidebooks can help any nature lover enjoy the natural world even more. The laminated booklets are light and can easily be packed into a backpack. In addition to those shown here, there are guides for reptiles, mammals, birds of prey, butterflies and edible wild plants. Find the guides in the Roaring Brook Nature Center gift shop, 70 Gracey Road, Canton. For more information visit roaringbrook.org or call 860-693-0263.

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Bathroom breaks

Look what you can do with $500 and a weekend

by Alicia B. Smith
Staff Writer

Home decorating shows, magazine articles and Pinterest photos can leave you feeling that your bathroom is inadequate. While prices for high-end fixtures and features can soar into the thousands, significant changes can be made with a budget of $500 and a weekend's worth of work.

David Litchfield of David Litchfield Building & Remodeling in Simsbury suggested taking a close look at the bathroom.

Paint is not expensive and makes a big impact. Litchfield suggested that a fresh coat of paint can go a long way but warned that the project is not as easy as some may think and that careful attention needs to be paid with any painting project so it comes out well. He suggested using a neutral color.

Work on the grout in the room as well.

"Cleaning the grout and getting the grout in good shape and looking at poorly installed silicon or grout and caulking around the tubs and showers" is important, he said.

Investing in a new shower door can be a good investment, Litchfield said. Sliding doors that span a tub cost $300 and up, while those for a shower stall are less.

"It may be a major improvement over what is there now," he said.

If the bathroom is truly decorated from another era – think pink toilet and tub – it might be worth getting a new toilet and investigate the cost of repainting the tub.

Replacing a toilet can be done in an afternoon, and a simple white toilet can be found starting at $100.

Bathtubs can be purchased for as low as $250, but replacing them is not an easy job. Replacing sinks is slightly easier, and white pedestal models can be found at home improvement stores starting at less than $200.

The easiest method would be to refinish tubs, sinks and tile with one of the spray- or brush-on formulas in bright white. Prices start at about $50 for one tub or two sinks. Once applied, the fixture must cure for three to five days before use. **WHL**

More information on David Litchfield Building & Remodeling of Simsbury can be found at davidlitchfieldbuilding.com or by calling 860-651-0123.

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Slice of LIFE

photos by Abigail Albair

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Feel the ArtBeat

9

The annual exhibit of West Hartford Public Schools student art work, titled "ArtBeat," is currently on display at the West Hartford Art League. The exhibition will continue through April 3. Gallery hours are Thursday through Sunday 1 to 4 p.m. For more information, visit westhartfordart.org. **1.** "Picasso Inspired Portrait" by Norfeldt fifth grader Jiani Zuo. **2.** "Tunnel" by Hall senior Sayaka Awao. **3.** "Found Paper," a collage self-portrait by Sedgwick eighth grader Sofie Jorgensen. **4.** "Bot" by Conard senior Dezyree Morales. **5.** "Aboriginal Drawing" by Sedgwick sixth graders Mackenzie N., Kimberly W. and Nona F. hangs beside "Vesfido Jibaro" by Conard senior Amarilyz DeJesus. **6.** A paper sculpture mask by Morley fourth grader Gavin Sherman. **7.** From left to right: a collage portrait by Sedgwick eighth grader Falyne Driver, "Twiggy" by Conard junior Paris Phillips, "Self-Portrait – Mary Cassatt" by Charter Oak student Fatima Wahidi and a portrait by Hall sophomore Camila Martinez. **8.** A group project titled "Lover's Eye" by Hall High School students. **9.** On left, clockwise from top left: "1 Point Perspective" by Bristow sixth grader Maya Palanki, "Sunflowers" by Whiting Lane third grader Zella Jackson, "Morphing Series" by Sedgwick seventh grader Halle Weissman. On the right wall: "Graffiti Tag" by King Philip sixth grader Isabel Boggio on top and "The Magic Sceptre" by Wolcott second grader Neila Feeney below.

Left: Newington Mayor Roy Zartarian and other dignitaries cut the ribbon at the opening of the new Autism Families CONNECTicut offices at 600 North Mountain Road, Newington. The nonprofit has been run out of its founders' homes since its creation six years ago. Above: Unable to find appropriate programs for her son, Jack, Jackie Bailey Procyk began Autism Families CONNECTicut with the help of her sister and mother.

Creating better lives

Autism Families CONNECTicut opens its first official home

by Lynn Woike and Mark Jahne
Editors

Begun around a dining room table in West Hartford six years ago, the nonprofit organization's founders were moved to tears of joy when an official ceremony March 4 marked the opening their first "home" in office space at 600 North Mountain Road in Newington.

It all started six years after Jackie Bailey Procyk gave birth to twins – a boy and a girl. When he was 2, her son, Jack, was diagnosed as being on the autism spectrum. When he was 5, Procyk tried enrolling him in several programs, some of which were for children with special needs, but none were a good fit.

"I was looking for something more tailored toward autism," she said.

There was nothing.

Within the next year, the idea of Autism Families CONNECTicut was born.

Along with her sister, Catherine Bailey, an attorney who moved to West Hartford from Boston to be closer to family, and their mother, Leah Bailey Moon, a Bloomfield resident who worked in corporate community affairs for 25 years, Procyk, who holds a masters degree in social work, began the organization she was looking for.

"We put our heads together and got the 501(c)(3) together. Put a board together and started programming in October 2010," Moon said.

Moon served as the volunteer executive director handling day-to-day affairs, along with fundraising and chairing the board while Procyk became the program director.

About 30 children attended the first four-week indoor sports and recreation program held at the Elmwood Community Center.

"Most of our programs started there. They really gave us our break. We had a nice partnership with them," Procyk said.

Initially, the focus was to provide programs for children ages 5-12.

"My husband would stay home with my daughter and I would take my son to the program," Procyk said, adding she began to realize siblings and parents wanted to participate. "We needed something for the whole family."

"When we started out in 2010, it was a relatively simple vision," Bailey said. "We would create a gym program where kids on the autism spectrum would feel comfortable and accepted, a judgment-free zone. It soon became clear that families in our community were longing for programs like this, where they felt they belonged. They kept asking for more. Before we knew it, we were planning family swimming and running club and teen nights.

"Part of AFC's strength is listening and adapting to the community we serve. While we initially aimed to provide fun programs for kids, those kids began to blossom into teens, and now teen nights are one of our most popular programs. Also, we noticed that parents and siblings wanted to be included, too. AFC now serves as a destination for the whole family to be together and have fun, through family events like pasta night and holiday parties."

The informal groups that formed forged friendships and served as a support network.

"Now we serve children and teens 3-21 years of age," Moon said. "We also have family events for all ages. We're trying to build a community of friends for these children, as well as a network and a community for the families."

As a parent of a child on the autism spectrum, Procyk said she plays a dual role.

"I'm always thinking about that parent perspective and reaching out to the parents, asking them, 'What do you want? What would make sense for your child?'"

She also offers the emotional support of a parent who has experienced the overwhelming emotions that come with an autism diagnosis, "educating the parents of younger children who are just starting on this journey," offering a brief respite from the worry, providing a different perspective and long-term support.

Describing how her family came together to support her son, Procyk said the organization is providing that same sense of family for everyone who participates.

"We're a very family oriented organization," she said. "We're here for the long term."

Hundreds attend events year round that provide children on the autism spectrum and their families with fun, recreation and socialization. Six different programs are run multiple times each year. Designed by clinicians, they develop skills, encourage active play, teach new activities, and support healthy growth and development.

Describing his involvement, West Hartford resident and board member Jim Procaccini said, "My grandson, Phoenix, a 9-year-old happy little guy, is on the autism spectrum. He has been so limited to activities that we all want for our children. His twin sister

attends numerous birthday parties and play dates while Phoenix has so few. Six years ago we discovered Autism Families CONNECTicut.

"At their infancy, they recognized the need for children on the spectrum to participate and have fun and mix with other children and not be left out. What a wonderful find for Phoenix and our family. I joined the board in 2012 to be part of the building and growing of AFC."

In 2014, Mary Helen Richer was hired to be the executive director – the first salaried staff person, paid through grants and fundraising.

"For the last six years we really have been working around dining room tables and borrowing space," she said. "What we were looking for was space large enough to hold our programs. It needed to be reasonably priced and centrally located."

"To have our own home is just so exciting," Moon added.

Richer and Procyk are also excited that now there is space for everything, and that equipment and materials no longer need to be transported from venue to venue.

The building's first floor contains offices and a space for the sibling club; upstairs is the main programming area and a parents' room that will soon be furnished.

"We are just thrilled. It's been a long time coming," Procyk added.

Already on the agenda are running, swimming, dancing, music, building, Friday night teen socials, holiday parties, beach day, Dad's Night Out, Mom's Nights, summer concert night, go-karts, family events and sibling activities.

Courtesy photo

Jack Procyk has fun at Playing on the Spectrum, Autism Families CONNECTicut's popular gym program.

"We're trying to build a community of friends for these children, as well as a network and a community for the families."

–Leah Bailey Moon

AFC integrates skilled therapists with the expertise of parents in creating its programs.

Autism Families CONNECTicut serves all of Greater Hartford. Families come from as far away as Stratford and Tolland to participate. Volunteers come from all over, too.

According to its literature, there are more than 9,000 children and teenagers in Connecticut on the autism spectrum. Agencies that serve them are few in number and many times program costs are high.

AFC's signature program is the first one it ran – Playing on the Spectrum. Children ages 3 to 13 participate in four-week sessions while their siblings are active in the sibling club. Structured activities serve to facilitate exercise and motor skills.

Wings with Autism is a program that teaches children with autism how to deal with airport security and boarding an airplane. This is conducted at Bradley International Airport in partnership with airport staff and the Transportation Security Administration.

Autism Families CONNECTicut participants get to attend the dress rehearsal of the annual performance of "The Nutcracker" put on by the Ballet Theatre Company. They also attend a special sensory-friendly performance of "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer" at the Bushnell Center for the Performing Arts.

Officials who attended the ribbon cutting offered a warm welcome to the staff, parents and families in attendance. Newington Mayor Roy Zartarian called the addition of this nonprofit part of the evolution of North Mountain Road, a mixed-use office park that contains for-profit businesses, a Hindu house of worship and two ethnic social clubs, among others.

Autism Families CONNECTicut is a member of the Connecticut Autism Action Coalition, Connecticut Association of Nonprofits, Leadership Greater Hartford and the Newington Chamber of Commerce.

The nonprofit will hold its annual fundraiser April 2 at the Simsbury Inn in Simsbury. The event raises 60 percent of the organization's operating funds. To learn more about that event, or about the organization, call 860-474-3444 or visit autismfamiliesct.org. **WHL**

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Studying animals

CCSU professor Sylvia Halkin is unraveling mysteries of their behaviors

by Mara Dresner
Staff Writer

Dr. Sylvia Halkin meets a young resident at Marineland Melanesia Crocodile Park on Green Island, Australia, on a trip with her Central Connecticut State University field biology class this past summer.

Sylvia Halkin is a professor of biology at Central Connecticut State University (CCSU). She earned her doctorate and master's in zoology from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and her bachelor's in biology from Harvard University. Halkin has a special interest in squirrels and birds, and her work has been published in numerous journals.

In 2006, she appeared on an episode of Animal Planet's "Most Extreme Pirates," demonstrating and discussing research on the pilferage-averting behavior of squirrels.

Halkin is a National Science Foundation research grant reviewer and does manuscript peer review for a number of journals including Animal Behaviour, Auk, Journal of Comparative Psychology, Journal of Field Ornithology and Urban Ecosystems. She was named a CCSU Excellence in Teaching Semi-Finalist in 2006 and received an Animal Behavior Society Distinguished Teaching Award for sustained excellence in the teaching of animal behavior in 2011.

Halkin's hobbies include harmonic overtone singing, dancing, cross-country skiing, canoeing and kayaking.

Q: Were you always interested in science?

A: Maybe not science, per se, but certainly the natural world. When I was bored as a child, my father, an artist, would take me outside "to see what was coming up" in the way of interesting plants, which he appreciated for how they looked and grew. And my mother, also an artist, believed strongly that scientific understanding gave people more control and power over their own lives. We had a good family friend who was a physicist, with interesting stories and games for my brother and me, so science seemed like a possible thing to spend my life doing.

What has always interested me about the natural world is that it's full of things I could never have imagined, that I find beautiful and

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intriguing, and I enjoy looking for explanations for them. For example, I think bird songs are beautiful, and they also fill my head with questions: Why is that bird singing now? Why did it just sing a shorter song than the last one it sang? Why did it just switch to a totally different song? What is its neighbor singing? Does a bird's singing predict what it's going to do next?

Q: How did your interest in biology and zoology develop?

A: I spent a lot of time outside as a child, exploring the vacant lots across the street from our Chicago apartment to see which flowers grew in the deserted gardens, and eating mulberries from the trees, and looking under rocks for pillbugs that curled up into a ball and then slowly uncurled to glide around again on their many little feet.

"We have learned that squirrels have a diversity of ways to protect the nuts they find from being stolen."

–Sylvia Halkin

At summer camp, I was fortunate to have a nature counselor who showed me how to use a field guide to identify the wildflowers I kept asking about. In high school I found other friends who liked spending time outdoors and identifying wildflowers, and one of them introduced me to bird identification.

In college at Harvard, kind and thoughtful professors hired me to help on their projects. My first college summer job was cataloging a collection of microscope slides of vertebrate embryos at Harvard Medical School. One day Dr. Charles Lyman, the professor I was working for, who knew I liked seeing new things in nature and that mockingbirds didn't live in Chicago, took me outside to hear a mockingbird singing; he told me they sing many songs of other birds, and nobody's sure why – that is still the case, though more people have studied various aspects of that question.

The next summer, I participated in a National Science Foundation-funded project to provide research experience for undergraduates, working with Dr. Robert Cook to study forest wildflower reproduction. The theoretical questions he was asking, about evolutionary advantages of different variations in what amounts to plant behavior, were new and exciting to me and gave me experience beyond simply identifying what I was seeing. I realized I was particularly interested in behavioral questions.

I did a small senior thesis study of sequencing in mockingbird song, with generous support and advising from Dr. Charles Walcott. With birds – which behave much more quickly than plants – I could observe and study whole behavioral sequences from the same individual. As a side benefit, looking up at birds instead of down at plants meant that my rather poor sense of direction got me lost less often.

After college, I worked for a year as a zookeeper in the Australia House at Brookfield Zoo, outside

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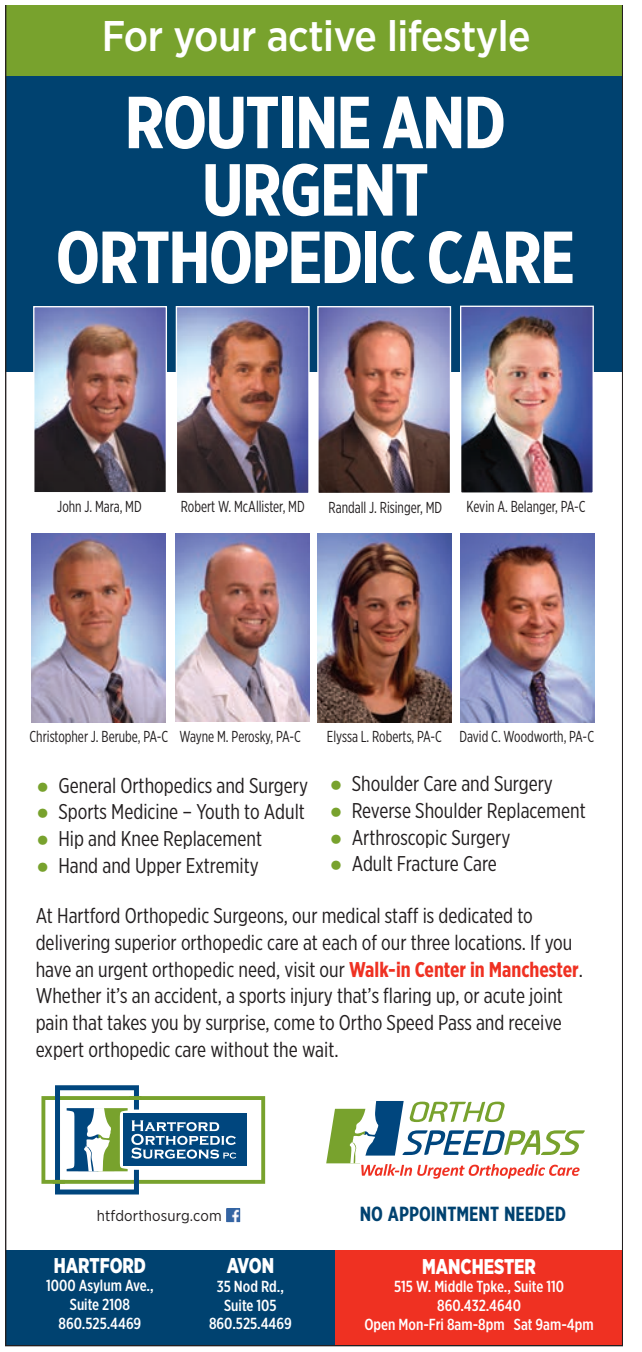
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Chicago, and then for seven months at Archbold Biological Station in Florida. I decided that in graduate school I'd like to study how birds use their song repertoires, and when I arrived at the University of Wisconsin, my professor Dr. Jeffrey Baylis suggested I study cardinals. I've been studying various aspects of cardinal song ever since.

Q: How did you come to Connecticut?

A: I came to Connecticut to be a professor in the Biology Department at Central Connecticut State University. It's been a great place to teach, with a really interesting and diverse student body, supportive colleagues, and a lot of flexibility to pursue my interests, both in teaching and in research. I have lived in West Hartford since coming to the state. I value the many, many resources the town has to offer, from a walkable business district with an excellent diversity of businesses and services, to local parks and friendly neighborhoods.

Q: What research interests you?

A: Behavior that's new to me, and variations on behavior I've seen before are interesting to me, as well as questions like how plants address the architectural challenge of keeping their leaves from shading one another. I also get good ideas from my students, who deserve credit for many of the questions I've pursued, often with their participation as research collaborators. While of course I have a lot of theoretical background for guidance in asking and researching questions, I start with observing the organisms. This has led me to asking questions that are relevant to the species I'm observing, and that are generally answerable in the contexts in which I can observe them.

"I found that singing [cardinal] females seem to be communicating with their mates about whether food is needed at the nest."
–Sylvia Halkin

Q: Can you give me an example?

A: My students and I have done a series of experiments to determine how squirrels respond when we try to steal nuts they have buried. The idea for these experiments came from T.J. McKenna, a really bright former student who's now a staff scientist at the Connecticut Science Center. Squirrels in natural conditions face theft of their buried nuts not only by other squirrels, but also by crows, blue jays and other nut-eating animals. We're intrigued that some of squirrels' responses to theft seem targeted to evading the capabilities of their recent thieves. For example, after we steal nuts, squirrels are more likely to bury subsequent nuts in places we can't reach, although other squirrels could get to them fairly easily.

Q: What attracts you to study squirrels?

A: Squirrels are relatively abundant on the CCSU campus, and if we invest some time in feeding them, they become accustomed to people being nearby. They also have rather remarkably complex behavior, and, as fellow mammals willing to interact with us, my students and I find them pretty charming. We started studying squirrels after my student Suzanne Tinti noticed, while assembling a behavioral catalogue for my Animal Behavior class, that sometimes squirrels would bury a nut and then also cover a place where they hadn't just buried anything. It seemed that this might be a way of misdirecting potential thieves, and an example of deceptive behavior by animals, a topic that has been relatively rarely described or studied. She generously gave me permission to pursue that idea with other students. I later learned that Dr. Michael Steele at Wilkes University was studying the same behavior, and he and his students and Dr. Peter Smallwood, another collaborator, have been great partners, first in helping me learn to work with small mammals, and then in collaborating on a research article and the Animal Planet show, and in continuing to help me to think about and refine ideas for projects.

We have learned that squirrels have a diversity of ways to protect the nuts they find from being stolen. In addition to covering sites where they haven't just buried anything, which Dr. Steele and his students have found does indeed misdirect other squirrels, and to putting buried nuts in locations inaccessible to human thieves, squirrels are also more likely to eat nuts after we've attempted to steal nuts they buried, a sure way to protect their new nuts from theft.

Q: What has been most striking with your research about birds?

A: The general theme has been how different species of birds use their

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vocal repertoires to communicate with one another. For my Ph.D. research I studied why female cardinals sing from their nests, an unusual behavior that would seem to put them and their young at risk by making the nest more conspicuous. Female cardinals sing the same songs as males, also unusual among temperate songbirds. I found that singing females seem to be communicating with their mates about whether food is needed at the nest. Because most birds don't sing from their nests, most bird predators probably hunt for nests visually, and if singing females can reduce unnecessary trips to the nest by their bright red mates, that may actually make the nest safer. In some locations, it seems that any song from the female signals the male to bring food. But in Madison, Wisconsin, females seemed to also give a "No, thanks" signal when they matched their singing mate's song with the same song from their shared repertoire. I don't know why there's the communication difference in different locations, and it could conceivably have been a statistical quirk, but since cardinals learn different local songs in different areas, they may also learn different rules for how to use them.

Q: Tell me about your experience on Animal Planet.

A: After I gave a talk on our research on theft-averting behavior of squirrels at an international conference of animal behavior researchers, I was contacted by the Animal Planet film crew to participate in an episode called "Most Extreme Pirates." I went with T.J. McKenna, Allison Gaudet and Stephanie Collins – all students who'd worked with me on the project – to be filmed with Dr. Steele and his students at their research site in Pennsylvania. It was a bitterly cold day, and we were lucky to lure a couple of squirrels out of the trees to eat and bury acorns. It was interesting to see what the film crew chose to film and how they directed us, and later, to see how they used their footage to show some things they hadn't actually been able to see the squirrels doing while they were there. My students acted out the process of a squirrel burying a nut and then covering a different location, and of another squirrel going to the wrong place to try to dig up the buried nut. For the actual program, the producers showed a sped-up version that got the message across clearly without taking much time. My students and I had a good time participating in the filming and working closely with Dr. Steele and his team, learning some helpful details of their research techniques, and we have enjoyed the bit of fame.

Q: How did you get into overtone singing?

A: I'd heard overtone singing when my father worked on an exhibit on Tibet at the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago, and I became curious about how it was done. In my first year in Connecticut, I went to a concert of Georgian singers, and after the concert a group including Jim Cole and his wife Patti, who I didn't know yet, were talking with the singers about high harmonic overtones they'd heard in the singing. Afterwards, I asked whether I could come hear Jim and his group sing. Jim said I was not only welcome to listen, but that he'd be happy to teach me to sing overtones myself, and I took him up on it.

For me, with very little musical training, it is a remarkably intuitive process. I can gener ally feel out which tones sound good with other sounds the group is making, and together we are able to produce a combination that's richer than its summed parts, as sounds we each make enforce and reverberate against one another. Sometimes it feels like someone else is singing in my throat, a pretty cool sensation when the other singers are several feet away. Some compositions feel like new songs we'd always wanted to sing; others just have neat acoustic phenomena. Part of what I enjoy is how different the intuitive and spontaneous process is from how I spend much of my time. And it's been rewarding to get to know the other members of the group, who have interesting and multifaceted lives, and are really nice people to boot. **WHL**

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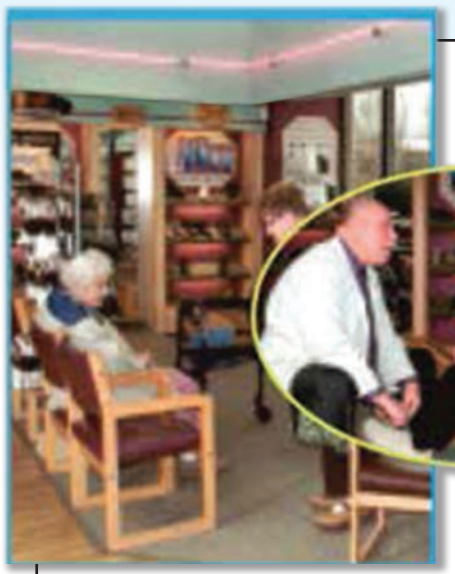

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Writer's block

Wondering about words

by Lynn Woike
Editor

I get paid to work with words.

When I recently heard a newscaster say, "The proof is in the pudding," I found myself yelling at the television, "No! It's not! The proof of the pudding is in the tasting."

The proverb is trying to say you have to try the food to know if it's good. It originated centuries ago when pudding was a type of sausage – animal intestines filled with minced meat and you don't want to know what else – and not a sweet custard-like dessert. I know the phrase was shortened as it morphed into something meaning to test it, you have to experience it, but I think it just doesn't make sense to say, "The proof is in the pudding."

It also doesn't make sense when someone says they could care less. They mean they could not care less, or that they don't care at all. If they could care less, then they obviously care to some degree.

Don't you agree?

Just don't tell me, "If that's what you think, you've got another thing coming." That sentence may sound correct, but it's not. The idiom goes like this: "If that's what you think, you've got another think coming." While it seems ungrammatical, it makes sense; if you have an incorrect thought, you'd have to think again for a chance to think a correct thought.

There are other phrases that are also illogical.

Back-to-back, for instance. It means two in a row, the end of one thing leading to the start of another. In that case, I think it should be back-to-front.

When people fall in love, they say they're head over heels when in fact, all our lives we walk around with our heads above our heels. Wouldn't "heels over head" better describe being upside down?

Quantum leap is also illogical. Literally, it describes when an electron moves from one orbit around an atom to another orbit. We're talking an extremely small distance, yet the phase is used to mean a great change.

That's why it's wise to avoid idioms when seeking advice.

On the one hand, you have "out of sight, out of mind," which is the opposite of "absence makes the heart grow fonder." "Opposites attract" is the opposite of "birds of a feather flock together."

If the pen is mightier than the sword, why do actions speak louder than words? And what about emoji? Too many cooks spoil the broth, yet many hands make light work. If you hesitate and look before you leap, won't you be lost?

As much as I love words, when you get down to brass tacks, they're not always cut and dried.

Take the phrase "as easy as pie." It might have been used to mean the same thing as "a piece of cake" or requiring little effort. Eating cake may take little effort, but making one does take effort. It's the same with pie – transferring a crust into a pan without it ripping can be touch and go.

Now, according to one source, Ogden Nash wrote a poem in 1936 in which this line appears: "Her picture's in the papers now, And life's a piece of cake." I would translate that to mean sweet or delicious – not easy.

Speaking of sweets, the expression that talks about getting "just desserts" sounds like someone will be getting a tasty treat. However, the phrase originated as "just deserts" meaning something deserved or earned, which makes more sense than getting a plate of brownies.

The phrase "good as gold" also means something different now than back in the day. It used to be a guarantee that a promissory note, or an IOU, was as safe to accept as gold. If you do hear it now, it is in the context of meaning well-behaved.

While "batten the hatches" has come to mean "prepare for imminent danger," it had a literal meaning most people don't know. A batten was a narrow strip of wood sailors would place around hatches on a ship to secure them for stormy weather.

Another old word that trips up people is sleight. The old, all-but-forgotten noun means trickery, deftness or cunning. It also means the one time it's used, it's often used wrong, so you'll see it written as "slight of hand."

The cultural context of "close but no cigar" is another that's been lost. The idiom dates back more than a century to a time when a cigar was the prize for winning a game at a carnival or along the boardwalk.

The other day, someone used the phrase to "drink the Kool-Aid" – someone who was not even born when, in 1978, Jim Jones got more than 900 members of the Peoples Temple to commit revolutionary suicide by drinking a grape beverage laced with cyanide. Even though the powdered mix was actually Flavor Aid, the phrase that entered the vernacular was to "drink the Kool-Aid." The speaker meant it as blindly following without question the stampede for the latest gizmo. It had lost all connection to death.

But then, we've also lost bandwagons and limelight and being able to buy a dozen of anything for a dime. **WHL**

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BY MARK DIXON
WFSB METEOROLOGIST [AMS]

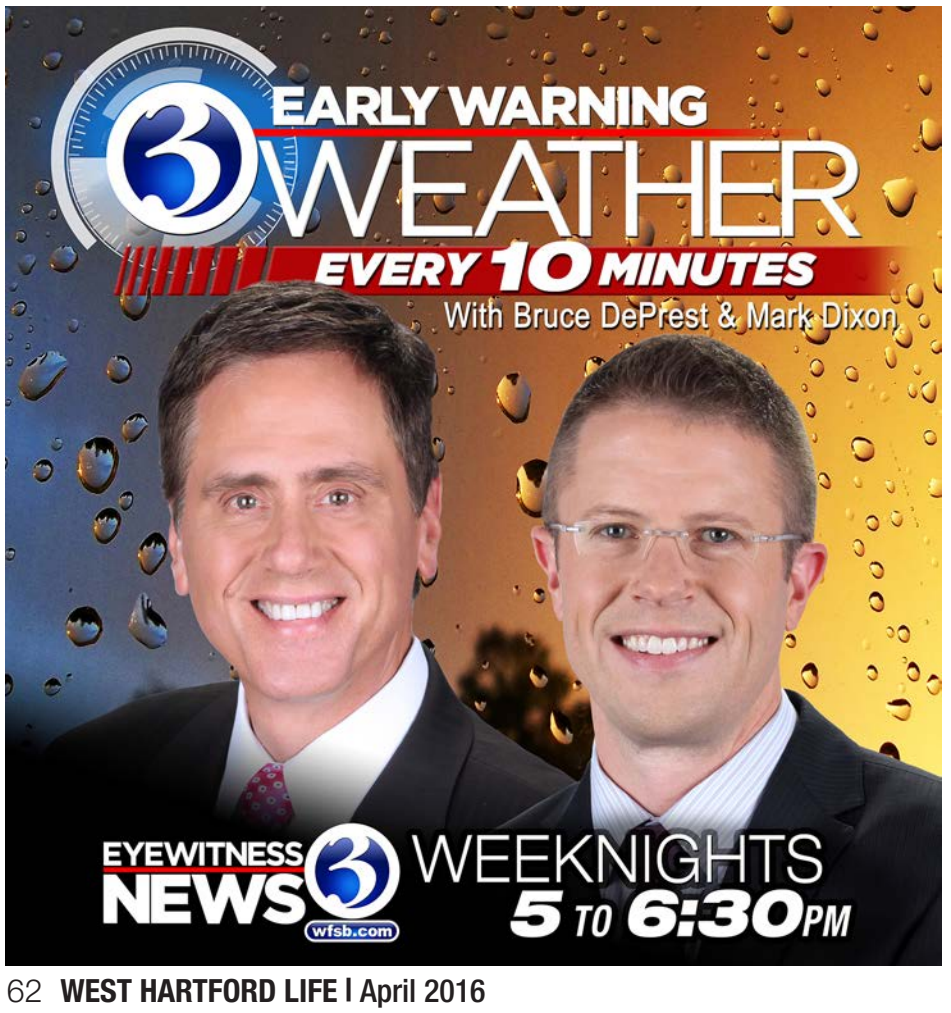
Winter 2015-16, an interesting one!

In the more than 110 years of record keeping, the average temperature for this winter of 35.1° places it in 2nd place for warmest. This, despite 2 days in February with low temperatures at -12° at Windsor Locks! The winter of 2001-02 remains at the top of the list with an average temperature of 35.2.°

Other records for the season: 31 days with a high temperature of at least 50° (previously: 26 days during the winter of 1932-33); also 9 days with a high of at least 60° (previously: 7 days during the winter of 1975-76 and that of 1953-54).

The warm weather this winter can be attributed, in large part, to a very strong El Nino. December was the warmest on record at an amazing 11.7° above average! January was 4.1° warmer than average, February came in at 2.3° above.

During the season, Windsor Locks had 11.08" of precipitation (rain, plus the water equivalent of snow and ice), 1.52" above average. Total snowfall was only 17.1", 13.6" below average (most of the snow occurred during the month of February with 14.2"). This will not be the least snowy winter on record – that honor still goes to the winter of 1936-37 when only 14.7" of snow was measured for Greater Hartford. **WHL**



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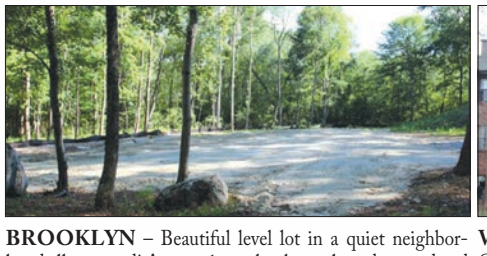

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